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PHD

## Learning Your Way Out? A Sociology of Working Class Educational Experience

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**Learning Your Way Out?**  
**A Sociology of Working Class Educational Experience**

Volume 1 of 1

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
Department of Social and Policy Sciences

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## **Declaration of material from previously submitted thesis and of work done in conjunction with others**

The thesis does not contain any direct material included in a previously submitted thesis. Whilst drawing on a similar literature, it does not use or draw upon any of the primary data included in the author's Masters degree dissertation, conducted before he began his PhD studies. The title of that dissertation is: *Newly Qualified Teachers Perceptions and Understandings of Class-Based Educational Inequalities: Bringing Class Back into the Classroom*. It was submitted in September 2007 to the University of Bath and the award of Masters of Research was awarded with distinction.

No work in this thesis has been done in conjunction with others. The work was supervised by Dr. Tess Ridge and Mr. Peter Cressey at the University of Bath. The thesis was copyedited by the author's partner.

## **Abstract**

This study examines the intersections of class, social exclusion and education policy during New Labour's time in office, with the bulk of its focus falling upon secondary schooling. Working against wider political, academic and popular effacements and recodifications of class, and with a particular focus upon its marginalisation within both political and academic discourses of social exclusion, both concepts are mapped out in ways which allow them to be understood in tandem and as rooted within the structures, processes and relations of society and its constitutive institutions. Qualitative in approach, and set within the ebb and flow of long running educational struggles heavily imbued with issues of class, the study uses semi-structured interviews with 21 education professionals to explore the impact of the current market-based education policy regime upon the institutional structures, processes and professional practices which confront working class pupils on a daily basis. In turn, it examines the ways in which working class pupils and the shaping of their educational experiences are understood by those trained and charged to teach in an education system intimately bound to the re/production of class inequalities and social exclusion. Parallel to this, the project uses biographically orientated interviews with 17 working class young people in order to explore the variegated ways in which class and social exclusion intersect within their schooling careers as they are shaped along shifting axes through, within, and against the kinds of contexts and conditions mapped out by education professionals. The study provides key insights into the contemporary circulation of class within schools: invoked through crosscutting narratives of 'ability', 'deficiency' and 'social constructivism' by education professionals caught within systemic pressures to perform, and a ubiquitous facet of working class educational experience which is continually stirring, settling, straining to be re/made, and wrought through shifting layers and dimensions of in/exclusion.

## List of Abbreviations

<b>ASBO</b>	Anti-Social Behaviour Order
<b>APS</b>	Assisted Places Scheme
<b>BHPS</b>	British Household Panel Survey
<b>BTEC</b>	Business and Technology Education Centre
<b>CASE</b>	Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion
<b>CAT</b>	Cognitive Ability Test
<b>CATE</b>	Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
<b>CES</b>	Centre for Educational Studies
<b>CRB</b>	Criminal Records Bureau
<b>CSE</b>	Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>CTC</b>	City Technology College
<b>DCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DES</b>	Department for Education and Science
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DfEE</b>	Department for Education and Employment
<b>EAL</b>	English as an Additional Language
<b>EAZ</b>	Education Action Zones
<b>EiC</b>	Excellence in Cities
<b>EPA</b>	Educational Priority Area
<b>ERA</b>	Education Reform Act of 1988
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>FFT</b>	Fisher Family Trust
<b>FOR</b>	Frame of Reference
<b>FSM</b>	Free School Meals
<b>GCE</b>	General Certificate of Education
<b>GCSE</b>	General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>GM</b>	Grant Maintained
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HMI</b>	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>ISA</b>	Ideological State Apparatus
<b>ITE</b>	Initial Teacher Education
<b>ITT</b>	Initial Teacher Training
<b>KS</b>	Key Stage
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>LEA</b>	Local Education Authority
<b>LMS</b>	Local Management of Schools
<b>LSE</b>	London School of Economics
<b>MUD</b>	Moral Underclass Discourse
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Education, Employment or Training
<b>NSOE</b>	New Sociology of Education
<b>NTBG</b>	No Turning Back Group
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification
<b>OAPEC</b>	Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>OfSTED</b>	Office for Standards in Education
<b>PRU</b>	Pupil Referral Unit
<b>RED</b>	Redistribution Discourse
<b>SAT</b>	Standard Assessment Test
<b>SEIR</b>	School Effectiveness and Improvement Research
<b>SETF</b>	Social Exclusion Task Force



<b>SEN</b>	Statement of Educational Needs
<b>SEU</b>	Social Exclusion Unit
<b>SID</b>	Social Integration Discourse
<b>SIMS</b>	Schools Information Management System
<b>SIS</b>	Social Investment State
<b>SCA</b>	Structure Consciousness Action
<b>SMC</b>	Scientific Manpower Commission
<b>SMT</b>	Senior Management Team
<b>TA</b>	Teaching Assistant
<b>TDA</b>	Teacher Development Agency
<b>TTA</b>	Teacher Training Agency

# 1

## **Introduction: Context, Themes & Issues.**

This study explores working class educational experience and the ways in which it is framed and influenced by policy, teachers, and young people themselves over time. It was formulated and took shape in the wake of several decades of widespread political, academic, and popular effacements and recodifications of social class, and at time when the policy and academic discourses of social exclusion had dominated thinking about inequality and disadvantage in the UK. In this respect, the study has centred around two broad and interlocking contradictions and concerns which contextualised the relationship between education and social class during New Labour's time in office.

The first relates to the contemporary 'paradox of class' in which a medley of doubts about its salience at the level of everyday life and experience have run parallel to its continuing structural impact (Bottero, 2004: 987). Indeed at one level, interconnected currents of social, economic, and political change appear to have eroded the value of thinking about class in terms of consciousness, action and cultural forms that hinge around people's explicit acknowledgement of their economic and occupational class positions relative to others (Devine & Savage, 2005). Yet at the same time, class remains a key social division and marker of life-chances in the UK, with research continuing to reveal its influence in relation to health, housing, mortality, income, (un)employment, and social mobility (Aldridge, 2004; Hall, 2006; Blanden *et al*, 2005; Milburn, 2009). In education too, recent research has continued to point to the ways in which educational opportunities and outcomes are stratified along the lines of social class (Raffe *et al*, 2006; Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2007a; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Milburn, 2009). However, a further component of this disjuncture has been that rather than a declining role within the cultural and symbolic realms, class has been increasingly euphemised, re-inscribed, and decoupled from structure through the resurgence of thinking about its associated inequalities in terms of personal and cultural deficiency (Skeggs, 2004).

Overlapping with this, the second broad contradiction around which the study has centred relates to New Labour's foregrounding of concerns to tackle social exclusion whilst also continuing to reform the education system in line with the direction established by its

Conservative predecessors. As a policy discourse, the array of ‘joined-up’ social problems associated with social exclusion were largely seen as stemming from a lack of paid work (Levitas, 2005). In this respect, education was central to New Labour’s political philosophy, providing the lynchpin of a logic in which strong economic prosperity and social justice were seen to be ‘two sides of the same coin’ (CSJ, 1994: 223). Whilst investing in the education of children and young people was seen as a prudent and long term way to stave off the individual and collective costs of social exclusion, by the same note, raising the nations stock of human capital promised to attract more investment and jobs into the UK and bolster its economy (Clarke, 2006; Brown & Lauder, 2006). At one level then, New Labour sought to tackle child poverty, expand early year’s education, develop area-based education initiatives for disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and address rates of truancy, permanent exclusion, educational disaffection and disengagement as part of a more general effort to raise educational standards and reduce the numbers of young people leaving school with low, few, or no qualifications. However, alongside the duty of government to expand opportunities for inclusion, there was a corresponding emphasis upon the personal responsibility of people to seize them (Alexiadou, 2005). This meant that as a policy discourse, social exclusion could itself slide and key into thinking about complex social problems in terms of individual and cultural pathologies (Levitas, 2005; Lister, 2004). In turn, whilst education was positioned as the engine of New Labour’s inclusive society, the broader thrust of its education policy widened and deepened a market system which has itself further extended the long and complex relationship between state education and social class.

Indeed, whereas the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked by fears about the potential for universal state education to interrupt and upset class divisions and associated lines of hierarchy, authority and privilege, after 1945 education became increasingly bound up with drives for national economic expansion and a fairer and more egalitarian society (Simon, 1991). Yet through successive tripartite and comprehensive eras in which each had aimed for greater measures of meritocracy, ideals and realities continually failed to marry-up (Haley *et al*, 1980). During the 1970’s a politically ascendant New Right came to argue that egalitarian politics were at the root of a social and economic decline in the UK. Forming part of a wider critique in which public service provision was seen to encourage economic stagnation and cultures of dependency, unaccountable teachers fuelled by left-wing ideals were held responsible for perceived falls in moral, behavioural and academic standards of young people who were seen as failing to meet the needs of the nation’s economy (Ball, 1990). A key source of their misconduct was seen to lie within the university and college departments in which

they were educated, and throughout the 1980's and 90's successive Conservative governments sought to refashion and mould the future teacher workforce via technically orientated training schemes that reduced space for critical explorations of the content, form and purposes of education (Hill, 2001). Speaking in 1992, Prime Minister Major made it clear that in future, 'teachers should learn how to teach children to read, not waste time on the politics of gender, race and class' (cited in Tomlinson, 2005: 56). This has led to sustained concerns that the teaching profession is currently 'ill equipped to broach, let alone tackle the greatest problem the educational system faces, that of working class educational underachievement, alienation and disaffection' (Reay, 2004: 7).

Yet gaining and maintaining control over practicing teachers so as to raise standards hinged around a new Darwinian approach to the provision of public services in which market principles shifted the balance from 'producers' to 'consumers'. In its idealised form, linking funding to pupils and allowing parents to choose between schools on the basis of standardised performance data was seen as a way of holding schools and teachers to account and driving up standards as they competed for custom and long-term survival (Ball, 2006). However, research exploring the impact of educational marketisation has revealed the ways in which it has created a 'new social device' for the perpetuation of 'old inequalities in new ways' (Reay, 2004: 337). Indeed, middle class parents appear to be more able to exercise and augment their choice-making in ways which increase the likelihood that their children attend well-resourced, high-performing schools (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995). Whilst this social logic of the market has lent itself to a greater degree of segregation between schools (Noden, 2001), this has been matched by greater amounts of segregation within schools as institutions have turned to increasingly differentiated and selective practices in an effort to make annual improvements in performance data (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). In this respect, as a zero-sum system of 'survival by results', its imperatives have significantly altered the nature of the teaching profession by 'introducing ideologies and managerialist practices more in line with business than education' (Winter, 2000: 161). As with reforms to pre-service training, the concern is that this has increasingly 'set limits on what is thinkable' within schools, and thereby left very little discursive or practical space for the less tangible and more humanistic and long-term issues of social justice (Bottery, 2000: 80).

Despite re-centring concerns for greater measures of egalitarianism as social inclusion and adopting a more colligate tone to its educational reforms, New Labour continued the tight focus upon the importance of 'standards' rather than 'structures' (DfEE, 1997; DfES, 2004,

2005; DCSF, 2008a, 2008b). Whilst it nonetheless went on to extend parental choice by diversifying the types of school available, raising the level and quality of educational attainment was seen to depend upon further modernisation of the teaching profession (Ball, 2008). Its strategy for this owed much to its acceptance of the message from some corners of School Improvement & Effectiveness Research (SIER) that different outcomes from schools with similar intakes meant that techniques and procedures could be identified and applied across schools to raise educational standards irrespective of pupils' social background (Harris & Ranson, 2005). This managerialist approach underpinned New Labour's 'zero tolerance' stance to 'failing schools' in which threats to replace management teams and staff underlined the view that technical efficiency, strategy, determination, strong leadership, clear targets, and exchange of good practice were the fuel of higher standards (DfEE, 1997; DCSF, 2008a, 2008b). Parallel to this, it also formally endorsed and encouraged the use of differentiated and selective practices within schools (DfES, 2004; DfES, 2004), and explicitly reduced and broke pupils down into units of ability/type by using tripartite-like terminology to stress the duty for teachers to ensure that 'every child – gifted and talented, struggling or just average – reaches the limits of their capability' (DfES, 2005: 20).

These are the contexts, themes and issues through which the present study has developed and sought to explore contemporary working class educational experience. In working within and between these tensions and contradictions, a key aim of the study has been to think about social class, compulsory education, and social exclusion together. In light of the paradox of class, it explores *how and in what ways social class continues to circulate within schools, and how this might complicate and problematise not only social exclusion as a political/policy discourse, but the broad thrust of the education policy regime*. Taking a qualitative approach, it explores the rhythms of schooling from the perspective of teachers and working class pupils, and draws upon understandings of class as an ongoing and lived process and structure of thinking, feeling, acting and relating which is peppered with intermittent levels of awareness, and continues to flavour people's trajectories through time and space (Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Reay, 1998, 2005; Charlesworth, 2000; Savage, 2000, 2003; Savage *et al*, 2001; Ball, 2003; Devine & Savage, 2005; Johnson, 2008). From this perspective, class is seen as lacing and lining what people do and what they say about themselves, their lives, their experiences, and those of other people, and in this respect, the study has sought to generate thick descriptions attuned to explorations of the subtle and nuanced ways in which class circulates at the level of everyday life and experience (Savage, 2003; Skeggs, 2004; Reay, 2005; Devine & Savage, 2005).

Set within the paradox of class and educational reforms which have attempted to remodel teaching as a technical and procedural endeavor, the first layer of empirical enquiry asks *how working class pupils and the shaping of their educational experience is understood by teachers*, and by the same note, examines *how education policy influences the institutional structures, processes and professional practices which confront working class pupils on a daily basis*. In exploring this in relation to both the pre-service preparation of teachers and the ongoing practice of teaching, this tier of the study uses semi-structured qualitative interviews with 9 PGCE<sup>1</sup> students, 9 teachers, and 3 Student Support Staff to examine how the paradox of class, training, teaching, and the education policy regime fit together both within and across their accounts. Yet through and against the educational conditions and contexts mapped out in these accounts, the second layer of empirical enquiry asks *how and in what ways working class children and young people experience compulsory schooling in its contemporary form*, and by the same note, examines *how their experiences are shaped along multiple axes within time and space*. Indeed, in seeking to think about social class, compulsory education, and social exclusion together, the approach adopted for this tier of the study has taken shape through an engagement with social exclusion as an academic discourse (Brown, 1990; Levitas, 1998, 2005; Burchardt *et al*, 1999, 2002; Byrne, 1999, 2005; Percy-Smith, 2000; Gordon *et al*, 2000; Lister, 2004; Hills, 2004; Pantazis *et al*, 2006; Levitas *et al*, 2007; Mooney, 2008). This body of work is largely quantitative and/or conceptual in nature, favouring causal understandings of social exclusion that highlight the role of global, national and local contexts; how they relate to social divisions, welfare provision, poverty and disadvantage; the political, economic and social roles of institutions; and the agency of other, more powerful groups. Generated amongst these multiple layers and dimensions, social exclusion is also seen to be relational, dynamic, and processural. Yet a number of researchers have pointed to the ways in which qualitative biographical approaches are particularly well attuned to the exploration of this relational, dynamic, and processural nature, producing thick descriptions of a temporal kind that can reveal the crosscutting sequences of events and experiences that might challenge or generate social exclusion (Chamberlayne *et al*, 2002; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005; Levitas *et al*, 2007). In turn, whilst biographical approaches also lend themselves to an exploration of the directional and processural nature of schooling (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005), there is a further degree of symmetry with the study's understanding of social class as embedded within the ongoing processes of everyday life and experience. For this tier of the enquiry then, these

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<sup>1</sup> The Postgraduate Certificate in Education is the primary route into teaching for those who already hold an undergraduate degree. It is a one year intensive course of which one third is based in departments of Higher Education and the remaining two thirds in 'blocks' of 'on job' training within schools.

degrees of methodological and conceptual triangulation have underpinned the use of biographically orientated semi-structured interviews with 17 working class young people between the ages of 16 and 18. Having already completed their compulsory schooling, interviews have sought to look back at the course of participants schooling careers, and to explore the ways in which they were continually worked out amongst the rolling intersections of institutional structures and process, and their wider lives both within and beyond school.

In many respects then, the study's key points of departure return to some of the enduring sociological concerns that have long orbited the relationship between social class and education – themes and issues relating to the overlapping worlds of pupils and teachers; forms of educational differentiation and selection; issues relating to education policy and institutional structure; the peer group; the textures of lives beyond the school gates, and again, how these might fit together (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Keddie, 1971; Willis, 1977; Ball, 1981; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Whilst this study circulates through the rich stock of research in these areas in an effort to trace lines of continuity, change and divergence, it clearly differs from much earlier work<sup>2</sup> in taking a retrospective biographical approach rather than an ethnographic and/or case study approach to single or multiple schools. Indeed, working in broader strokes, it is based in two urban areas of south west England and has drawn its samples of participants from across two universities (9 PGCE students), three secondary schools (9 teachers; 3 Student Support Staff; 11 young people), and three careers advisory and training centres for young people (6 young people). In this respect, whilst the study has sought to capture a breadth of contextual educational experience, through its biographical component it has simultaneously sought to home in on length, looking for similarity and difference in the multiple ways that things might move, shift, and/or stay the same as working class children and young people experience the chronicity of compulsory schooling. In turn, although the study's discursive emphasis relates to secondary schooling, it pays close attention to the significance of young people's preceding experiences of primary schooling.

Yet the study also builds upon a number of key contemporary works, both overlapping with and extending their enquiries. Whilst Gillborn & Youdell's (2000) ethnographic exploration of the impact of market forces within secondary schooling provides a number of key conceptual tools, this study adds a consideration of pre-service teacher training, explores how education professionals map market forces and the working class family on to one another, and provides

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson & Marsden (1962) took a retrospective look at working class experiences of Grammar schooling.

a much more comprehensive examination of pupils' experiences of contemporary schooling. In turn, MacDonald & Marsh's (2005) use of a biographical approach to explore the multiple constitutive careers of youth transitions in East Kelby, Teesside, has also been key in the development of this study. Their work has interrogated the 'underclass thesis' and probed the concept of social exclusion through the lens of class, and whilst this study addresses similar themes and issues, again, it does so with a much tighter and more detailed focus upon schooling, foregrounds an intersecting emphasis upon the dynamics of education policy, and incorporates the perspectives of education professionals as key actors within schools. Finally, whilst Youdell's (2006: 56, 175) thick ethnographic explorations of the ways in which pupils are discursively constituted through multiple nodes of inequality has been a useful theoretical resource, rather than observing 'discourse in action' through micro 'data-episodes' of interaction, this study works from the perspectives and experiences of actors themselves.

### ***Chapter Maps.***

In Chapter 2 we take the long view of the study's key themes of class, education policy, institutional structure and the teaching profession. From the early development of the compulsory state system of education to the 1997 election of New Labour, it explores schooling as an intensely political arena in which class has been a key and constant theme. Whilst tracing key shifts in educational provision allows us to place the contours of the contemporary system within long running currents of continuity and change, it also allows us to explore the rich stock of sociological research which has previously explored the relationship between social class and education, and serves as an important resource through which to understand and locate this study's own findings. In Chapter 3 we continue these parallel currents of exploration with a specific focus upon New Labour's time in office. In turn, it also engages in a detailed examination of social exclusion as a political/policy discourse, exploring a number of key tools for keeping track of its shifting meanings, and teasing out the ways in which it was related to compulsory schooling.

In Chapter 4 we switch gears and move into detailed theoretical explorations of class and social exclusion as academic concepts, unpicking the ways in which they can be brought together and explored through a qualitative approach. Beginning with an overview of theoretical and empirical disjunctures within 'traditional' class analysis, it then moves on to explore the way in which class began to slip off the academic agenda towards the end of the last century, and its subsequent reinvigoration by the 'new' directions in class analysis which have informed this study. In turn, unpicking social exclusion as an academic discourse, we



position it as a useful analytical concept, bringing it together with class in ways which can be used to explore both as dynamic, processural and relational facets of the social world. Finally, in this chapter we also take a close look at research which has already worked at the intersections of class, social exclusion and schooling (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005; Youdell, 2006).

In Chapter 5 we move on to set out the study's core ontological and epistemological positions and give a detail overview of the development and implementation of the research design. Here we cover the research tools of semi-structured and biographical interviews, explore issues of sampling, access and gaining informed consent, and pay close attention to ethical issues throughout before closing with an overview of the study's analytical procedures. Chapter 6, 7 and 8 explore the study's empirical components, with the first of these examining the accounts of education professionals. Here an opening section sets out findings relating to the contemporary nature pre-service teacher training, a second examines the intermingling external and internal dynamics of schooling, while a third explores how education professionals could position parents in relation to these dynamics. Chapter's 7 and 8 explore young people's respective accounts of primary and secondary schooling. Taken together, they examine the rolling and shifting intersections between multiple axes of their lives within and beyond school, drawing out the ways in which careers can already be significantly shaped by class and lines of in/exclusion before young people move into their secondary schooling.

In Chapter 9 we set key findings from both education professionals and young people within broader discussions that draw upon the study's theoretical framework and its reviews of both policy and existing research before pulling out some conclusions, and directions for future work in Chapter 10.

# 2

## **Class, Education & State: A Sociology of Education in Historical Perspective.**

### ***Introduction.***

This chapter picks up the study's key themes of class, education policy and structure, the teaching profession, and the various ways in which the reproduction of class-based inequalities in and through education have been understood. These key themes are examined in parallel from the early development of the compulsory state system to the 1997 election of New Labour. It takes a historical approach in order to explore schooling as an arena of political and socio-cultural struggle that intersects with continuity and change in wider society, and to locate the contours of the present system within that history. This brings into view the persistence, transformation and reoccurrence of particular issues and concerns. In particular, the prism of class draws out the often ideologically infused tensions between education, social justice and social change, and the perceived functional relationships between education, economy, regulation, social order and control. At the same time it allows the changing position of class within the politics of education to be traced alongside the shifting tone and influence of a sociology of education dominated by the concept during this period. Indeed, while the sub-discipline has always been more or less 'determined' by changes in education policy and structure, its various positions have also depended upon using older stances as critical points of reference for newer ones. Tracking these developments historically serves in highlighting the consistency of concerns for the ways in which education policy and structure impact upon the ways in which children have been 'thought about' and 'processed' within schools. At the same time, this also facilitates the mapping out of accompanying theoretical and conceptual vocabularies, which in turn provide valuable interpretive resources for making sense of these processes in their present forms.

### ***'The Emergent System'<sup>3</sup>.***

Class was a central organising principle in the development of state education in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Prior to the 1870 Education Act, the existing 'system' of education was already deeply rooted within the country's rigid class structure. Whilst fee-based secondary

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<sup>3</sup> Simon (1994: 42).

education and public schools prepared middle and upper class children for life within the professions and society's elite, charitable and faith-based organisations provided small numbers of working class children with an 'elementary' education in numeracy and literacy and taught them to be 'pious, industrious and to know their place in society' (Griggs, 1989a: 37). It was a system built around the idea of social-predestination, and intended to 'confirm rather than transcend existing social divisions' (Brown, 1990: 394).

However, the beginning of the Victorian period was also marked by mounting middle and upper class fears over the growth of the urban working class (Stedman Jones, 1984; Welshman, 2006). New urban living conditions and the unprecedented levels of poverty accompanying them became tied to concerns over moral and social decadence and political unrest (Stedman Jones, 1984). From an educational perspective, anxieties about the potentially contaminating effects of a growing and degenerative 'social residuum' fuelled concerns over the limited availability of elementary education for working class children (Griggs, 1989a). Some worried popular education might lead 'the masses' 'to despise their lot in life' (Giddy, cited in Plummer, 2000: 6); while others believed that the 'right kind' of education would teach them 'to appreciate and defer to a higher cultivation when they meet it' (Lowe, cited in Griggs, 1989a: 45). Education might also ensure that the voting rights extended to all male householders in 1867 were used 'wisely' (Ball, 2008), and cultivate the kind of work-ethic needed to safeguard the British economy (Bauman, 1998; Stedman Jones, 1984).

This broad sense of 'fearfulness' was also heavily gendered (Ball, 2008: 58), with perceived threats to order and stability rooted in concerns over the socialisation and domestic skills of working class girls, who as future wives and mothers, were seen to play a vitally important role in the (re)production and care of the nation and its (male) workforce (Plummer, 2000; Purvis, 1987). Fearfulness also underpinned the majority of government interventions in education prior to 1870, which largely focused upon ensuring 'the character of teachers would be appropriate as role models for their working class students' (Ball, 2008: 59).

### ***The 1870 Act.***

Whilst a limited and piecemeal move towards a national system of elementary education, the 1870 Education Act was significant in developing the infrastructure for a future state system (Ball, 2008), and providing the thin end of the wedge for those committed to the eventual expansion of education to all children (Griggs, 1989a). The Act filled the gaps in provision by allowing locally elected ratepayers to form School Boards and use local rates to build and

administer elementary schools (Simon, 1994). While this meant progress towards a modern national system proceeded in a somewhat chaotic and uncoordinated fashion, School Boards were successful in producing a dramatic rise in elementary provision by the end of the century (Griggs, 1989a).

In 1880 provision was sufficient for elementary schooling to be made compulsory for 5-10 year olds, whilst the increasing prevalence of interventionist and collectivist ideas led to its being made free in 1891 (Ball, 2008). Further legislation set down by the Education Act of 1902 laid the final foundation of the modern state education system by centralising the provision and management of elementary education through the replacement of School Boards with Local Education Authorities (LEA's) unified under a newly formed Board of Education (Simon, 1994). The Act also established a fee-based system of LEA secondary schools. However, there was no linear progression to these schools after elementary education, and the great majority of working class children would have to wait until 1944 to receive any kind of secondary schooling (Bernbaum, 1967).

### ***The Post-War Consensus.***

The core of this 'tiered and classed model of education' persisted up until the final years of the Second World War, which contributed massively towards pressures for its reform (Ball, 2008: 64). Both the First and Second World Wars had uncovered and produced anxieties over the country's technological and scientific shortcomings and the educational weaknesses seen to underpin them (Simon, 1991). However, the mobilisation of the entire nation for 'total war' during the latter had also exposed 'new, unexpected potentialities' among those who had previously been rejected by the education system (*ibid*: 35). Moreover, people from all classes had made sacrifices, suffered, or given their lives in the conflict. The sense of solidarity generated by this 'equality of sacrifice' generated fundamental questions over the kind of society that would follow if the nation survived (Griggs, 1989b). Indeed, many uncomfortably recalled the impact of recession, rising unemployment and limited opportunities for younger people before the war (Bernbaum, 1967). At the same time, Keynesian arguments that a combination of taxation and government spending could underpin production and minimise male unemployment intersected with the Beveridge Report's (1942) suggestion that it might also fund the promotion of positive freedoms through a stronger welfare state (McKenzie, 2001). As Simons (1991: 35) points out, 'as the war proceeded' all these factors combined into 'a widespread realisation... that it was impossible... to go back to the stagnant, class-ridden society of the 1930s'.

### ***The Tripartite Solution.***

While there was consensus over the need for reform, the nature of the new system was the result of compromise. From the 1920s criticism had begun to crystallise amongst labour and teaching unions who saw the dual-system of secondary and elementary education to be both wasteful of working class abilities, and a key mechanism in the maintenance of an iniquitous social order (Griggs, 1989b). Like them, the Labour Party had also been greatly influenced by the educational thinking of Tawney<sup>4</sup>, and held a similar commitment to the idea of single-site ‘multilateral secondary schools’ in which children of all classes would receive a general education before following differentiated courses from the age of 13 (Simon, 1991). In 1938 the Spens Report into secondary schooling suggested that the lines currently drawn between children were ‘always artificial and often mistaken’; that some kind of reform was therefore needed; and that secondary education should be made compulsory and free at the point of use (Griggs, 1989b: 59). Yet it also opposed the idea of multilateral schools, and instead proposed a state system of grammar, secondary modern, and technical schools. Drawing upon the work of educational psychologists who saw ‘intelligence’ as innate, inherited and fixed (Chitty, 2004), the 1943 Norwood Report suggested that tests and examinations could establish the future potential of children at aged 11. It went on to claim that ‘types of mind’ fell into three categories – academic, technical and practical – and that the three different types of secondary provision outlined in the Spens Report could ‘match’ them in terms of the schooling they required (Tomlinson, 2005).

The Conservatives staunchly supported the idea of a differentiated system, and were particularly keen to preserve the elite system of public schools from the threat of the multilateral school (Simon, 1991). In 1942 they safeguarded them by ordering a committee of enquiry to consider their future, seemingly aware that it would be too late for recommendations to affect the Education Bill now beginning to take shape (Simon, 1991). The 1944 Education Act replaced elementary education with a universal primary school system from which children would progress - according to ‘age, ability and aptitude’ - to the universal and free tripartite system of secondary schooling outlined in both the Spens and Norwood Reports<sup>5</sup>. The 11+ - a mix of ‘intelligence’ and attainment tests in English and Maths – taken by all children at age 11 was used to establish children’s ‘type of mind’ and allocate them to

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<sup>4</sup> Tawney (1931: 145) held that class was the ‘hereditary curse of English education’, and that educating children separately ‘perpetuate[d] the division of the nation into classes of which one is almost unintelligible to the other’.

<sup>5</sup> In reality the system developed into a bipartite one as very few technical schools ever materialised (Ball, 2008).

the corresponding ‘type of school’. Moreover, whilst grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools were different, there was to be ‘parity of esteem’ between them. It was to be a ‘national system locally administered’ in which power and decisions were distributed and held in check within a ‘triangle of tension’ between central government, LEA’s, and individual schools and their teachers<sup>6</sup> (Briault, 1976: 431; McNay & Ozga, 1985: 2).

Such a compromise was made possible largely by the fact that the views of educational psychologists were still widely accepted in the educational world (Griggs, 1989b), and because the Labour Party’s ‘planning for [post-war] reconstruction fell back on a gradualism which chimed with the mood of the Board of Education’ (Lowe, 1988: 7). Moreover, whilst the wording of the Act legitimised a tripartite secondary system, it was also sufficiently vague for it to be reinterpreted in a way which would allow for multilateral schools (Chitty, 2004: 19). Finally, this ‘second wave’ (Brown, 1990) of educational reform appeared to represent a great improvement upon the preceding system (Chitty, 2004). It constituted a significant ideological shift away from a system organised around ‘accidents at birth (ascription)’ towards a meritocratic system based upon ‘age, aptitude and ability (achievement)’ (Brown, 1990: 395). A huge sense of optimism surrounded the belief that in creating a free and universal system underpinned by competitive tests and examinations, ‘ladders of opportunity’ now existed for greater numbers of working class children to be both educationally and economically successful, and that grounds had thereby been laid for an economically strong and socially just society (Plummer, 2000; Chitty, 2004; Brown, 1990; Tomlinson, 2005; Simon, 1991). Although the scale of Britain’s post-war reconstruction meant that the new system did not fully develop until the mid-1950s, McKenzie (2001: 178) points out that ‘during the long time it took to implement the changes, it gradually became clear that idealism was not going to be matched by reality’.

### ***The Sociology of Education.***

The development of the sociology of education during the early 1950s<sup>7</sup> made a number of contributions to the dawning of this reality (Tomlinson, 2005; Rubinstein & Simon, 1969). Indeed, what would later become known as the ‘old’ sociology of education closely aligned

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<sup>6</sup> Briault (1976) suggested that within this relationship central government essentially held the power to say ‘no’ and to legislate (ideally in collaboration with other partners), LEA’s controlled the distribution of resources, and individual schools and their teachers were responsible for the curriculum, teaching, and the use of resources.

<sup>7</sup> Many authors trace the sub-disciplines roots as far back as Booth, Webb and the political arithmetic tradition of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but consider the 1950’s to be its formative years (Halsey, Heath & Ridge, 1980; Ball, 1995; Heath, 2000; Dale, 2001)

itself with political concerns over the links between education, economic efficiency, and social justice (Williamson, 1974), sharing in the ‘redemptive view’ of education and its potential for achieving both (Dale, 2001). However, this alignment lay between caution and criticism of the new system, essentially producing work which sought to test assumptions that the 1944 Act was distributing educational opportunities on the basis of ability rather than class. Yet whilst inequalities of class formed the core of its focus, it largely eschewed theoretical explanations by concerning itself with the description and mapping of social facts as a ‘preliminary to political reform’ (Halsey *et al*, 1980: 3). Indeed, on occasion its optimism and pragmatic belief that the identification and adjustment of structural and processural ‘handicaps’ could achieve greater measures of the ‘redemptive ideal’, coincided with political efforts to root aspects of reform within research (Shain & Ozga, 2001). In this respect, research uncovering the shortcomings and injustices of the new system was able to augment developing arguments against the selective tripartite system and subsequent moves towards multilateral - or comprehensive - schools during the 1960s (Heath, 2000).

One of the first studies to point to the continuing link between class and the educational opportunities of the new selective system was Halsey & Gardner’s (1953) survey of the class composition among grammar and secondary modern boys in London. Revealing a massive middle class over-representation in the former, they concluded that despite the 1944 Act it remained that ‘a boy has a greater chance of entering a Grammar School if he comes from a middle class rather than a working class home’ (*ibid*: 74). These findings were supplemented by Himmelweit’s (1954) survey of London grammar school boys, which demonstrated that once at grammar school, middle class boys outperformed their working class counterparts of equal IQ. Moreover, while teachers appeared to see working class boys as less than ideal pupils, the middle class boy was portrayed as ‘a more satisfactory and rewarding pupil’ (*ibid*: 149). Himmelweit suggested that explanations for such differences might lay with the family, and recommended that further research investigate the attitudes and aspirations of parents.

Martin’s (1954: 160) exploration of the ‘attitudes of parents towards different types of post-primary education’ went some way in doing just this, revealing that working class parents gave ‘less thought’ to the issue of their children’s education. Yet whilst working class parents nonetheless showed a general preference for grammar schools, such a preference coincided with having given more thought to their child’s education, and with smaller family sizes. Many of these findings were again reiterated and generalised in a larger, dedicated study of class and educational opportunity by Floud *et al* (1956). ‘A direct result of this kind of

analysis' was an increased concern over the 'wastage of ability' (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973: 62), which was soon to find wider expression in a number of government reports.

In 1957 Floud & Halsey explored this concern specifically in relation to lack of grammar school provision. In a study of 3 cohorts of boys sitting the 11+, they found there were insufficient grammar places for all those who passed, concluding that the subsequent moving of the benchmarks for entry<sup>8</sup> constituted 'social wastage no less serious than that resulting from the social discrimination in selection' (*ibid*: 214). Parallel to this, the 11+ itself - the theoretical keystone of the new educational order - had already come under serious attack. Simon's (1953: 34) study of primary schools described a situation of 'schools within schools' which he likened to a system of 'conveyor belts' where only the fastest offered any 'real chance of being deposited in a grammar school'. The importance of successful grammar selection at age 11 placed huge pressures upon primary schools from parents concerned that their children should be well prepared for the hurdle - and a sense of anxiety and duty amongst headteachers and teachers that they be so - leading primary schools to become two or three-streamed schools organised hierarchically on the basis of tests administered at the age of 6/7 (*ibid.*). Despite attempts to camouflage streams with Roman numerals or teacher's names, 'children normally managed to penetrate these defences' and were 'not unnaturally liable to get dispirited and lose confidence in their own abilities' (*ibid*: 35). However, given that many pupils, particularly those from working class homes, had not had the time to master the techniques, syllabi, and necessary vocabulary for the tests, Simon suggested that they did not 'warrant conclusions about the abilities of children'. Yet as 'A' streams steamed ahead, subsequent testing and the eventual 11+ examination only appeared 'to justify the whole process' (*ibid*: 38).

Heim (1954) also drew attention to the ways in which people could be 'coached' for 'intelligence' tests, and further bolstered Simon's work with strong methodological and theoretical critiques of intelligence testing. At the same time, The Early Leaving Report (1954) not only echoed Himmelweit's findings that upper working class entry to grammar schools did not necessarily translate into success, but that they also constituted the majority of children who left the schools early. Concerned with this same 'wastage of ability', the Crowther Report (1959) examined the numbers progressing to Further and Higher Education upon successful completion of secondary education. It revealed that not only did 48% of pupils with IQ's of

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<sup>8</sup> While an IQ of 115 was considered to be the threshold at which children could benefit from a grammar school education, it was often raised in response to a lack of local provision often (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973).



120 and above leave the system at 16, but that they predominantly came from working class backgrounds.

The question of whether ‘parity of esteem’ had been achieved was tackled by Olive Banks (1955), who found that in comparison to grammar schools, secondary moderns were under-resourced, over-crowded, often located in dilapidated buildings staffed by non-graduate teachers, and concluded that ‘while the grammar school bestows upon its pupils the coveted social and educational qualifications necessary to advancement there can be no parity of esteem within the tripartite system’ (*ibid*: 8). Several years later, May’s (1962: 92) assessment of the inequality of esteem, resources, and the prospects offered to grammar and secondary modern school pupils in Liverpool led him to suggest that there remained ‘two nations in education’.

This divisiveness and the tendency towards working class ‘failure’ was also captured by Jackson & Marsden’s (1962) study of the social impact of grammar schooling upon working class children. They used qualitative interviews with 10 middle class ex-grammar school pupils and 88 more from working class backgrounds to look retrospectively at their educational experiences. Whereas Simon (1953) had explored the ways in which processes of selection preceded the 11+, Jackson & Marsden (1962) examined the subtle and nuanced forms of selection which followed it, and in many ways anticipated several key themes later fleshed-out and animated in the work of Bourdieu. Indeed, they explained how middle class families appeared to have been able to provide their children with an ‘educational inheritance’ which synchronised them with the values and rhythms of the grammar school (*ibid*: 56). For working class children, the middle class environment of the grammar school often demanded they ‘accommodate themselves to middle class values, or rub up against them’ and be ‘pushed out’ (*ibid*: 240, 231). Indeed, Jackson & Marsden found that the separation and upward mobility involved in grammar school education – the new knowledge, manners, accents and friends - often carried heavy costs for working class children in terms of the family and friends rooted in their lives before the 11+, and that it was a ‘minority of the survivors.... who declared for the neighbourhood and against the grammar school’ (*ibid*: 172). They pointed to the interplay between the ‘schools insensitivity and the child’s hypersensitivity’ which often found expression in the rude and tactless slights over differences in home-life, accent, speech, and the general marginalisation and devaluation of working class cultural interests, sporting and leisure pursuits (*ibid*: 128).

Concerned with future levels of Higher Education expansion after increased demand and the pending impact of the 'baby boomers', the Robbins Report (1963) levelled a heavy blow against tripartism in its complete rejection of fixed intelligence and the accompanying notion that the nation had a limited 'pool of ability'. In the same year the Newsom Report's examination of the educational prospects for 'average' children came to similar conclusions. Taken together, the combination of research and government reports raised fundamental doubts over the tripartite system's ability to underpin the British economy and tackle class-based inequalities, and in turn fuelled arguments for a shift towards a system of comprehensive education (McKenzie, 2001).

### ***The Political Build-up to Comprehensive Education.***

Committed to the preservation of grammar schools, the three Conservative governments between 1951 and 1964 remained hostile to the threatening possibility of a comprehensive secondary school system (Lowe, 1988). Whilst by the early 60s they largely agreed that the 11+ exam was a serious socio-economic and political issue, and that educating more children to higher standards was a necessity (Tomlinson, 2005), their favoured solution was the development of technical and vocational specialisms within existing secondary moderns (Simon, 1991). Indeed, the 1950s had seen the further entrenchment of industries rooted in new technological and scientific knowledge, and as numbers of unskilled workers declined and the ranks of white-collar employees and professionals expanded, tensions increased over the rigid shortcomings of the existing system (Simon, 1991). It was thought that developing secondary modern specialisms would not only meet Britain's industrial needs, but also alleviate increasing parental resentment of selection by allowing schools to 'offer something special that could not be had elsewhere' (Eccles, cited in, Simon, 1991: 186). Indeed, a core issue throughout 1950s was the growing mismatch between coveted grammar school provision and the growing aspirations of the 'new' middle class and aspirant working class 'for whom secondary moderns schools were clearly regarded as second best' (Ball, 2008: 69). Indeed, for middle class parents in particular, there was the very real fear that 'their children might be displaced from grammar schools by limited numbers of 'bright' working class children' (Tomlinson, 2005: 18). Until the early 1950's the 'triangle of tension' had been relatively stable, held together by a widely shared belief that the selective tripartite system was underpinned by a sound rationale (McKenzie, 2001). The fact that it was local administrators and teachers who bore the brunt of increasing pressure from parents began to upset this balance of power (Griggs, 1989b; Rubenstein & Simon, 1973).

Shortages of teachers after the war had left them at a high point in terms of influence and social status (McKenzie, 2001). However, like local administrators, those who had been keen to press for multilateral schools after 1944 found it difficult against the backdrop of the Cold War (Lowe, 1988). Indeed, concerns about subversive influences within teaching colleges and schools had also become an issue of parliamentary debate, and in 1950 Middlesex County Council went as far as barring communists from teaching posts (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973). The general climate sent ‘a threatening warning not to step out of line, and a general atmosphere developed hostile to critical thinking and intelligence as well as radical innovation’ (Simon, 1991: 125).

However, alongside arguments against ‘intelligence’ testing and the reliability of selective procedures, perhaps of greatest significance for both teachers and local administrators was the impact of parental pressures for some kind of certification for secondary modern school leavers (Simon & Rubenstein, 1973). Indeed, from the late 1950’s this had resulted in small but increasing numbers of secondary moderns offering the grammar school leaving examination to their high achieving pupils. The relative successes of those previously rejected by the 11+ raised serious concerns about the efficiency of dividing children at aged 11, and led significant numbers of teachers and administrators to become more vocal in the drive for reform (Simon, 1991). Combined with parental pressures, this grass-roots support underlined the Labour Party’s 1953 conference commitment to a national system of comprehensive schools, which was endorsed by many of the teaching and labour unions (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973). Rubenstein & Simon (1973: 94) suggest that there was a shared conviction that all the issues essentially boiled down to the ‘hard fact’ that the maintenance of a divided system depended upon unreliable and wasteful selection procedures. In this respect, it was clear that tapping the pool of working class ability ‘could only be achieved in conditions of an open contest, which required a shift to comprehensive education’ (Brown, 1990: 396). Yet besides economic imperatives, shifting the system away from metaphorical ‘ladders of opportunity’ to a ‘broad highway of opportunity’ also had important egalitarian underpinnings (Tomlinson, 2005). Indeed, it was believed that educating all children together could break down class divisions and replace prejudice and mutual misunderstanding with a more unified, democratic society (Ford, 1969).

This grass-roots pressure continued throughout the remainder of the decade and into the 1960’s and even resulted in some very limited but significant areas of comprehensivisation (Ball, 2008). Indeed, reluctantly, the Conservative government allowed comprehensive

‘experiments’ to take place under the severely limiting condition that they did not impact upon any already existing schools (Simon, 1991). These piecemeal and incoherent comprehensive footholds and grass-roots pressures for decisive reform were finally ‘crowned’ in 1964 with the re-election of a Labour party with a mandate to pursue a national policy of comprehensivisation (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973: 89). In 1965 it issued Circular 10/65 declaring the government’s intention to ‘end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education’ (cited in, Chitty, 2004: 29), and *requested* that all LEA’s submit plans for comprehensivisation within a year. However, McKenzie (2001: 198) notes that ‘just as the idealism of the 1940’s led to unreasonable expectations of selection at 11 for a tripartite system, idealism led to unreasonable expectations of what comprehensive schools could achieve’.

### ***The Primary System’s Response.***

From 1964 the balance of power within the ‘triangle of tension’ was largely restored as the growing momentum amongst local administrators and teachers no longer went against the grain of central government (Chitty, 2004). Moreover, the pressures placed on the system by the ‘baby-boomers’ meant that teacher training continued to expand from the mid-50s onwards. In 1962 courses became 3 instead of 2 years in length and teaching became an all-graduate profession (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973). Whilst this raised the status of the teaching profession, it was boosted further by the integration of many training colleges into universities, which subsequently brought young trainees into contact with the sociology of education (Demaine, 1981, 2001; Dale, 2001). As a new generation of teachers joined the profession and Circular 10/65 began to remove pressure to prepare children for the 11+ exam, Simon (1991: 352) describes ‘an extraordinarily rapid swing towards unstreaming’ within primary schools, which brought greater amounts of flexibility and opportunity for teachers to explore new directions. Set against the backdrop of the 1960’s ‘cultural revolution’ and the questioning of traditional forms of authority, innovative ways of bringing out the best in mixed ability and social groups were sought out (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973). Indeed, whilst not as universal or as radical as has often been assumed (Tomlinson, 2005; McKenzie, 2001), some schools became more informal, their classrooms more open-plan and mixed in terms of both ‘ability’ and age, and their teaching methods less didactic, drawing upon the experiences of pupils themselves in order to develop relevant curricula (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973).

### ***Primary Progressivism: a Political and Academic Shift.***

The Plowden Report's (1967) examination of the transition of primary pupils to secondary school accelerated this 'progressive' movement (Simon, 1991: 365). Indeed, it not only echoed the Robbins Report in dismissing streaming and the idea of innate and fixed intelligence, but also stressed the impact of environmental factors upon educational achievement. Using HMI to categorise the country's primary schools, it placed the most progressive of them at the top of a ranking system<sup>9</sup> as models of best practice. What it considered to be the best schools incorporated an adaptability and flexibility which coincided with its arguments that similarly aged children were individually unique, variegated in terms of intellectual and physical maturity, and learned best by 'doing' and interacting with their environment (Simon, 1991). However, the report also considered pupils' family background and parental attitudes to be among the crucial factors in determining their 'educability'. In this respect it was rooted within earlier studies (Himmelweit, 1954; Martin, 1954; Floud *et al*, 1956), but was particularly influenced by Douglas' (1964) detailed longitudinal study of a cohort of 5000 babies born in the first week of March 1946. Indeed, Douglas was not only able to reveal that by the time his national sample made the transition from primary to secondary school, middle class pupils tended to be ahead and improving at faster rates than their working class counterparts of equal IQ, but that parents of the former also took progressively more interest in their children's education and were more likely to visit and intervene in their children's schooling. Against a backdrop of a steadily advancing economy, near full male employment and rising affluence, while the Plowden Report acknowledged the effects of poverty and material needs, it nonetheless suggested parental attitudes, ambitions and (in)activities could have an equal or greater impact upon children's responses to school in what were now seen to be the vital early years.

In evaluating the report 20 years on, Halsey & Sylva (1987: 7, emphasis added) suggested that its wider significance lay in the recognition that 'educational reform had not in the past and was unlikely to in the future bring an egalitarian society *unaided*'. Indeed, the report recommended that the most materially, socially and culturally 'deprived' areas of the country be designated Educational Priority Areas (EPA), and targeted with positive discrimination policies that redistributed the resources needed to achieve smaller class sizes and recreate schools as 'community schools' which would seek to involve parents more closely (Simon, 1991). Antony Crosland, Secretary of State for the Labour government's newly formed

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the fact that the country's 20,664 primary schools were assigned to 9 categories in which 5,802 fell into the top third, 10,827 in the middle third and 3,359 in the bottom third, confirms suggestions that progressivism was far from universal (Plowden Report, 1967).

Department of Education and Science (DES), firmly believed that ‘planning backed by economic and sociological research could be internalised into DES administration’ (*ibid*: 3), recruiting Halsey as both personal advisor and national director of the EPA project. While EPA’s were clearly embedded within the ‘redemptive view’ of education, they rested upon the notion that with most of the ‘major institutional barriers’ out of the way, a shift in emphasis towards early ‘compensatory education’ was needed in order to tackle those inequalities and disadvantages which continued to prevent ‘equality of opportunity at the starting line’ (Banks, 1968: 54).

### ***The Secondary System’s Response.***

In terms of secondary schooling, responses to Circular 10/65 were more complex. Indeed, the request rather than insistence that LEA’s submit plans for comprehensivisation, ‘allowed some authorities to procrastinate... and ensured piecemeal development school by school’ (Tomlinson, 2005: 20). Furthermore, while the number of comprehensive school pupils steadily rose from 8.5% in 1965 peaking at 85% in 1981 (Ball, 2008), the concept of the comprehensive school remained ambiguous, with many schools differing greatly in term of their ‘ability intakes, commitments and practices’ (*ibid*: 70). Indeed, the fact that Circular 10/65 encouraged rather than laid down a single pattern of organisation meant ‘comprehensives’ could take the form most palatable to local socio-political constellations (Rubenstein & Simon, 1973). Moreover, whilst varying degrees of ‘progressivism’ found its way into secondary education, it was severely circumscribed by a highly ‘anomalous’ exam system (Simon, 1991: 294).

Indeed, the development of examinations for a General Certificate of Education (GCE) for grammar school leavers in 1951 had meant that technical and secondary modern pupils were barred from acquiring any kind of formal qualifications. However, legislation in 1962 altered the system and offered the GCE - or ‘O’ level - to the top 20% of the ‘ability’ range (primarily grammar school pupils), a new Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) for the next 40%, and no exam for the remaining 40% (Tomlinson, 2005). Whilst the survival of this examination structure after 1965 owed much to the simple fact that there was a complete lack of serious thought given to the issue at the DES (Ball, 2008; Chitty, 2004; Simon, 1991), the result was that a powerful residue of the tripartite system became transposed onto the developing comprehensive system, and subsequently led many to begin streaming pupils at the age of 13 or 14 in order to prepare pupils for the relevant examinations (Simon, 1991). Griggs (1989b: 65) points out that the impact of this exam system was powerfully compounded by the

constant pressures generated by the comparison of comprehensive school results with those of previous grammar schools, and that many appeared to have forgotten that the latter was 'academically and consequently socially selective'. The overall impact was that comprehensive schools were compelled to resort to the very measures they were supposed to overcome.

### ***Early Comprehensivisation Research.***

The inconsistencies of the emerging comprehensive system were born out in early examinations of its impact. Indeed, Ford's (1969: 131) study of 3 London comprehensive schools provided 'pointers' that neither educational nor social arguments for comprehensivisation were being fulfilled. As with the tripartite system, children appeared to quickly develop clear expectations of what they could achieve in terms of occupations and to develop their informal associations accordingly. Ford concluded that on the basis of her sample there was 'no evidence that comprehensive education contributes to the breaking down of social class'. She also argued that whilst such schools were non-selective in their intake, they were engaged in a less public form of selection by streaming, which had also already been 'working itself out for years in primary schools' (*ibid*: 134).

Barker-Lunn's (1970: 274, 276) longitudinal study compared 72 streamed and un-streamed primary schools between 1963 and 1967, revealing that whilst there was 'no evidence that children of different social classes did academically better or worse in either type of organisation' there were significant differences in 'emotional and social development'. Indeed, un-streamed pupils were more likely to hold 'more favourable attitudes' towards 'class, 'other image' of class and [have more] motivation to do well at school' (*ibid*: 275). They also contained greater numbers of mixed ability friendships, and whilst 'bright children from higher social classes' were most active in wider school activities, there was nonetheless more involvement by all pupils than in streamed schools (*ibid*: 276). The effects of un-streaming also appeared to impact upon parents, whose hopes and aspirations were less influenced by a 'child's ability than... [those] of parents of 'streamed' children' (*ibid*: 276). However, Barker-Lunn also drew attention to the ways in which within unstreamed schools those teachers in favour of streaming could create a 'streamed atmosphere' in their classrooms, and that their attitudes, methods, lessons, and even their compartmentalised seating arrangements appeared to be contradicting, consciously or unconsciously, the aims of a non-streamed school' (*ibid*: 273).

Nash (1971, 1973) provided a deeper examination of this theme in his explorations of the difficulty involved in disguising pupils' relative academic classroom positions in unstreamed classes. Whilst Nash found that children in unstreamed classrooms would often be required to join different intra-classroom seating groups for different subjects depending on ability, like Simon (1953), he also found that attempts to 'camouflage' group differences failed. Children 'knew just what groups there were, knew which were the higher and which were the lower, and knew who was in each group' (Nash, 1971: 248). He concluded that 'whatever else children may learn or fail to learn in school, they learn... to measure themselves against their classmates' and that in this respect, 'schools teach hierarchical levels of personal worth more successfully than anything else' (*ibid*).

### ***From Optimism to Pessimism: British Sociology of Education's Theoretical Turn.***

Whilst the 'old' sociology of education's move from the structure of schooling towards issues of class and value orientations had served in raising interest in how these impacted upon pupils inside schools (McKenzie, 2001), by the end of the 1970's a number of academic inquiries had become much more closely focused upon the organisation, values, and processes of schooling itself. In this respect, Simon (1953) and Jackson & Marsden (1962) had already been important forerunners, and were later joined by Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) before the beginnings of a more fundamental shift was signalled by the appearance of Young's (1971) edited collection, *Knowledge and Control*. Whilst both Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) had conducted their fieldwork in the early 1960s before 10/65, their examinations of streaming and peer group behaviour were important given that powerful pressures to continue streaming persisted.

Based within a secondary modern school, Hargreaves' (1967, xi) ethnographic study focused upon final year boys as the 'crystallisation of the values inculcated by the school and an end-product of the educational process'. As a form of 'differentiation', he not only found streaming to be a defining organising principle of the school, but that pupil friendship-groups had developed around streams and often embodied a powerful set of values, norms and hierarchy which demanded conformity and influenced identity formation. Indeed, differentiation provided a framework for subcultural 'polarisation' amongst pupils, and the process by which lower stream boys became progressively hostile to both teachers and higher stream 'academic' boys. Barred from examinations and high status streams, these 'deliquescent' (*sic*) boys lowered their aspirations and lost any rationale for working hard at school. As these two peer-group subcultures polarised they acted as negative reference groups and made stream



demotion or promotion fearful and undesirable prospects for both, causing each group to harden. Despite comparable 'IQ's', Hargreaves suggested that teachers often compounded such processes by conflating pupils' attainment and attitudes with 'ability', and subsequently came to 'expect little' from 'deliquescent' streams (*ibid*: 186). Using a similar methodology, Lacey (1970: xi) developed the themes of differentiation and polarisation in relation to the 'disappointing performance of working class boys in grammar schools'. Whilst he found that these two interrelated processes generated a working class peer-group subculture of 'anti-school boys' which rejected the culture and values of the school and middle-class 'pro-school' boys, Lacey also revealed how they could be subtly played out within non-streamed classes. Indeed, almost immediately after starting at grammar school, both pupils and teachers would begin to evaluate where and how one another stood in relation to the normative and academic values of the school, which in turn led to the development of certain types of relationship and position-taking.

Like Hargreaves, Lacey suggested that his micro-sociological work attempted to fill an 'obvious gap in the sociology of education' whose macro-sociological emphasis had examined the relationship between education and society in its entirety with correlations of class, achievement, 'IQ' and family/ background in particular (*ibid*, xii). Yet in contrast to this 'complimentary stance', what came to be known as the 'new sociology of education' (NSOE) emerged as the first of several critiques which pitched a more wholesale rejection of the sub-discipline (Banks, 1982; Shain & Ozga, 2001).

Indeed, introducing the NSOE's seminal text, Young (1971: 3) argued that sociologists of education had tended to take up the problems of politicians and educators in ways which failed to problematise the assumptions, categories, definitions, purposes and interests they contained. In contrast, he suggested that the contributors to his volume shared an essential refusal to 'take for granted existing definitions of educational reality' by 'making' their own educational problems (*ibid*). Moreover, he argued for the need to move away from what Williamson (1974: 4) later described as the "'black box' approach to education", which considered the inputs and outputs rather than the content and processes of education. The implicit argument was that the educational 'failure' of working class children did not hinge around issues of 'educability' or comprehensive and compensatory schooling, and that the relative failure of the solutions they promised only confirmed that the crux of the problem lay elsewhere (Dale, 2001). Indeed, despite liberal underpinnings, focusing upon the socio-cultural aspects of children's development and responses to schooling had shifted the spotlight onto various

forms of working class 'lack'. This in turn generated deficit understandings of working class educational performance which left the criteria by which they appeared to be 'lacking' out of the equation (Bernstein, 1970). For Young, schools should no longer be considered neutral, but as socialising agents involved in the transmission of socially and culturally constructed bodies of knowledge whose tones and textures were thereby bound to questions of social, cultural and political power and control. From this perspective, working class 'failure' lurked within the assumptions upon which schools, teachers and their interactions with pupils rested. This required a methodological shift towards observation as a means of exploring the phenomenology of educational criteria such as the taken-for-granted 'meaning of success and failure... definitions of good and bad pupils and... differences between what teachers say and do' (Banks, 1982: 20). Yet despite the NSOE's attempts to redefine the core focus of the sub-discipline, the fact it sought social change via alterations in the content and processes of education rather than its structures, and identified teachers and their educators rather than policy makers as the primary mechanism of change, left it firmly rooted within the 'old' sociology of education's 'redemptive view' of education (Young, 1988). Moreover, both approaches were alike in placing class inequality at the centre of their politics (*ibid*).

Keddie's (1971) contribution to '*Knowledge & Control*' problematised constructions of 'failure' and 'ability' in a streamed comprehensive school. Amongst teachers, she found a discrepancy between an '*educationalist* context' in which they considered issues of ideology, theory, school politics, and discussed 'how things *ought* to be in school', and a '*teacher* context' - 'the world of *is*' - related to the anticipation of classroom interaction, its unfolding and recounting (*ibid*: 135, original emphasis). The former embodied an 'informed and expert view of education' and was the context in which notions of fixed and inherited intelligence were denied, and the divisive and disadvantageous impact of streaming and labelling processes were recognised. However, Keddie found teachers could often 'speak and act' in contradictory ways within the 'teacher context' (*ibid*: 136). Indeed, in this context teachers not only spoke more about the 'moral' and 'social' aspects of pupils than their cognitive skills, but would also present them '*as though they were* cognitive skills' (*ibid*: 141, emphasis added). This fed into the development of typologies of normalised pupils within each stream, which could sometimes render certain pupils 'out of place'. Keddie offers examples of A-stream pupils whose challenges to classroom order meant they were considered to be misplaced B-stream pupils, while other A-stream pupils being entered for CSE examinations rather than the higher 'O' level exam were not. Yet the conflation of ability and behaviour was also complicated by class as a major category by which teachers unpicked both. However, rather than appearing as

the collective, structural category embedded within the ‘educationalist context’, in the ‘teacher context’ class appeared in an individualised form which stressed the social pathology of working class pupils and their families. The resulting behavioural problems and lower levels of ability underpinned claims that the most demanding aspects of the curriculum lay beyond their intellectual capacities.

However, Keddie’s (1971) empirical study was the only such contribution to *Knowledge and Control*, and one of the principle criticisms of the NSOE was its failure to produce a serious body of such literature from its theoretical framework (Banks 1974; Whitty, 1974; Karabel & Halsey, 1977; Bernbaum, 1977). Its failure to grow into a coherent position owed much to both philosophical and ontological difficulties and the fact it was quickly fractured by subsequent theoretical, socio-economic, and political developments (Banks 1982; Robinson, 1981). Indeed, there were two key tensions at the heart of Young’s (1971: 4) sketch of the NSOE’s ‘meta-theoretical position,’ which prevented its phenomenological sociology from mapping onto its ideological commitments (Sharp & Green, 1975; Bernbaum, 1977). First, while the approach’s stress upon human beings as creators of realities in which meanings and categories were contingent provided a powerful weapon with which to challenge dominant situational definitions, the fact that this also undercut grounds for alternative claims made its ‘ultra-relativism... a double-edged sword’ (Karabel & Halsey, 1977: 133). Secondly, coupled with the fact that the NSOE’s phenomenological procedures limited questions of time and place to that which was ‘immediately observable, interpretable, and attributed by participants’ (Bates, 1980: 70), such contingency placed the very social structures deemed to be problematic beyond reach (Bernbaum, 1977; Karabel & Halsey, 1977).

This made conditions ripe for the swing back to structure, which accompanied the growth of neo-Marxist approaches that re-invoked macro-sociological investigations of the economic and socio-political influences upon education. Whilst also concerned with the role of schools in perpetuating class inequalities, they differed in explicitly linking their (re)production to the nature and needs of capitalism, and in this respect moved the focus of analysis ‘“behind the backs’ of reformers’ and teachers’ intentions’ (Baron *et al*, 1981: 186). In this respect, the work of Althusser (1971) was particularly influential (Robinson, 1981). Whilst Althusser (1971) saw society’s economic base as its ultimate determinant, rather than its institutional superstructure being a pure expression of this base, he suggested that the superstructure was characterised by a degree of semi-autonomy insofar as it was deeply involved in the (re)production of those conditions necessary for the continuing existence of its base. Indeed,

Althusser suggested that through and alongside ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’ which operate via physical force and violence to safeguard the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, an assembly of ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ (ISA) function to regulate and control reproduction in ways that are more hidden and obscure. In this respect, and in conjunction with the law, media, church, and family, the fact that schools were deeply involved in the socialisation and skills development of the labour force made them key agents of the reproduction and acceptance of subjugation and submission necessary for capitalism’s survival.

Informed by such thought, and in looking historically at U.S educational reform, Bowles & Gintis (1976) suggested that each stage of reform was marked by an imperative to ensure that education and production ‘corresponded’ with one another. In contrast to the NSOE’s focus upon educational content, they examined the relationship between economy, labour relations and process, and educational *form*, arguing that behind the ‘overt curriculum’ lay a ‘hidden curriculum’ which sought to socialise pupils into the habits and relations necessary for their differentiated integration into the economy. Indeed, the social relations of education – ‘between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, student and students, and students and their work’ – were seen to ‘replicate the hierarchical divisions of labour’ and the ‘vertical authority lines’ of the workplace (*ibid*: 131). However, such a powerful swing back to structure left little room for considerations of the micro-processural lines of conflict and struggle which the NSOE had sought to emphasise. Whilst producing a similar examination of the interplay between economic base, superstructure and domination, Gramsci’s (1971) assertion that the erosion of ruling class ‘cultural hegemony’ was a necessary pre-condition of revolution countered this kind of overdetermination, rendering the cultural and ideological realms as a sites of struggle, potential human agency, and change.

Willis’s (1977) ethnographic case-study of the school-to-work transitions of 12 working class anti-school ‘lads’ in a northern English industrial town attempted to the work at the intersections of these neo-Marxist variants. In recognising a disjuncture between the individualised chase for credentials and the unlikelihood of their own social mobility, ‘the lads’ fell in favour of the camaraderie which stemmed from ‘having a laff’ at the expense of teaching staff, ‘academic’ boys, and the norms and values of the school which the latter embodied. Unpicking the apparently self-destructive nature of such a choice, Willis laid bare its logic as ‘the lads’ saw it, suggesting it constituted a subversive acceptance of failure as a means by which they actively resisted the norms and values of the school whilst valorising

their own peer-group subculture. Indeed, whilst recognising that ‘the system’s’ ultimate self-reproduction endorsed the general thrust of Bowles & Gintis’ (1976) ‘correspondence theory’, Willis was concerned to provide a more Gramscian counterbalance to this dry and overly structural account of education’s role by tracing the intimate connections between structure, culture, and agency lining the reproductive process (*ibid*).

Indeed, for Willis (1977: 17), rather than applying to the ways in which pupils were ‘processed’ by schools and teachers in terms of streaming or treatment, differentiation described ‘the process whereby the typical exchanges expected in the formal institutional paradigm are reinterpreted, separated and discriminated with respect to working class interests, feelings and meanings’. Whilst this shifted the emphasis towards the agency of ‘the lads’, Willis hung onto a notion of social structure within the school environment by taking their wider working class culture to be the key mediatory prism through which their experience of the material world was refracted and rendered meaningful. He suggested that through their agency, ‘the lads’ drew upon this culture – itself a semi-autonomous historical product of collective material experience (Willis, 1978) – and transformed it through the production of a new and spontaneous working class counter-cultural form. Yet while largely rooted within their initial identification of a meritocratic disjuncture, such expressions ultimately failed to ‘reach their full potential or a political articulation’, and remained what Willis (1977: 145, 119) called ‘partial penetrations’ – limited by ‘blocks, diversions, and ideological effects... [which] confuse and impede their full development’. For instance, in devaluing the teachers, ‘ear’oles’, and the school values they embodied, ‘the lads’ also rejected ‘academicness’, and thereby actively reproduced distinctions between mental and manual labour and replicated lines of solidarity and division in the workplace. Moreover, whilst their feminisation of ‘academicness’ consolidated them in their roles as hard, male, manual workers, it also served in duplicating the gendered division of labour. By the time ‘the lads’ reached the shop-floor, they were already well prepared for their positions in the occupational structure.

In assessing the sociology of education in the 1970’s, Ball (1995: 257) suggests that the period was marked by a dramatic and decisive shift from ‘pragmatic optimism’ to ‘radical pessimism’. Indeed, the ‘redemptive ideal’ was confronted with explanations of the durability of class inequalities within and through education which left little room for policies that could only ever tinker around the edges of the minutia of classroom interaction, the hegemonic bourgeois state, and the omnipotent logic and demands of the economy.

### ***The Political Response: Education in Crisis.***

In the political realm too, the late 1960's marked the beginning of 'a new polarisation within the whole field of education' (Simon, 1991: 390). Indeed, regarding the previous decade as 'a period of liberal anarchism when traditions were wantonly destroyed and educational standards lowered' (Tomlinson, 2005: 21), those conservatives who had remained ideologically opposed to comprehensivisation viewed the education system as plunging into chaos. They responded with a series of 'Black Papers' described by Ball (1990: 29) as marking the beginning of a 'discourse of derision' in which 'all aspects of the progressivism of the comprehensive school – curriculum, teaching methods and social relationships – were... debunked'.

Indeed, by 1970 the continuing grass-roots pressure, an earlier call from the Scientific Manpower Commission (SMC) for greater educational expansion, and the already steady momentum of reform made the re-election of a Conservative government with Margret Thatcher as minister at the DES seem of little consequence (Simon, 1991). Yet her very first action was to cancel Circular 10/65, setting a change in tone at the DES and generating a new disequilibrium within the 'triangle of tension' as local administrators and teachers backed by parental pressure fought it out with central government (*ibid*). Yet without any alternative policy, her strategy was to hinder the progress of comprehensivisation proper by attempting to preserve individual grammar schools and prioritise funds for the redevelopment of primary school buildings (*ibid*). However, after the oil shocks of 1973, events were rapidly engulfed by the onset of recession and the erosion of the prosperity underpinning the Keynesian post-war settlement. As the crisis unfolded, its educational impact was felt not only in budgetary terms, but in the raising of fundamental concerns over the quality of the link between education and economy (McKenzie, 2001). Indeed, by the end of the year spending in education had been cut by 8% and had tightened the brakes on reform (Simon, 1991). Employers also began to suggest that the country's difficulties and 'virtual collapse of the youth labour market' owed much to the education system's failure to produce high quality school-leavers (Ainley, 1988: 89; Ball, 1990).

Yet despite an inheritance of massive inflation, a negative balance of payments and rising unemployment, after its re-election in 1974 the Labour government immediately made a renewal of requests for the submission of LEA comprehensive plans with Circular 4/74 before finally making it a requirement in the 1976 Education Act. Twenty-three million of the original cut of £500 million was also made available for new building projects and the process

rolled on (Simon, 1991). However, by then the ‘discourse of derision’ had begun to expand to ‘horrific proportions’, and what Simon (*ibid*: 441) describes as a sudden ‘demolition job’ commenced: ‘a new style of total, massive denigration’. Indeed, while the direct readership of the Black Papers was relatively small, their messages were publicised extensively by the media (Griggs, 1989b), which invariably depicted comprehensives as ‘“blackboard jungles’ staffed by lefty teachers’ (Tomlinson, 2005: 21). Despite the fact that the emerging caricature was anchored in ‘snap-shot views of localised problems’ (McKenzie, 2001: 223), they underpinned generalisations about the entire system and were quickly accepted as part of ‘what we all know about schools’ (Ball, 1990: 28). Such ‘snap-shots’ were epitomised in 1976 at London’s William Tyndale primary school, where teachers were dismissed after a high-profile public enquiry prompted by concerned parents found indiscipline and a down-playing of proficiency in the 3R’s. The Tyndale case resonated with the Black papers’ key themes, raising issues of pedagogy, authority, left-wing militancy, and the issue of ‘to whom were teachers... accountable?’ (Simon, 1991: 446). In 1977 the BBC waded in with a *Panorama* programme depicting the chaos and indiscipline of an ‘average’ comprehensive school, and then reported on the demoralised and sombre moods of various teacher conferences during the year that followed (McKenzie, 2001). Prime Minister James Callaghan made a disastrous attempt to wrestle the initiative from the right by meeting what he gauged to be public concern head-on. In a speech at Oxford’s Ruskin College in October 1976, he called for a ‘Great Debate’ on education, defining its key terms via assertions that both academic and behavioural standards had deteriorated, and that besides being financially inefficient, an overemphasis upon preparing children for their social role in society had allowed clear inefficiencies in education’s relationship to industry and commerce to develop (Griggs, 1989b; Simon, 1991). Whilst stating from the outset that his words were not a ‘clarion call to Black Paper prejudices’ (cited in Simon, 1991: 450), conservatives quickly responded with the contented accusation that Callaghan had stolen their clothes (Cox & Boyson, 1977). Indeed, Ball (1990: 33) describes the impact of this intervention as an endorsement of a binary between ‘reason and madness’, which subsequently allowed the last ‘defenders’ of the comprehensive system to be ‘picked-off as subversive, damaging to the interests of children and the nation’. This was compounded by the fact that the ‘discourse of derision’ developed parallel to academic critiques of the impotence of educational reform. This coincidence of critiques from both Left and Right meant that the comprehensive system was now firmly boxed in on all sides. By the time the first Thatcher government was elected to office in 1979, a firm set of foundations had been laid for far-reaching educational change.

### ***From Radical Critique to Radical Reconstruction.***

The incoming Conservative manifesto contained very little in the way of education policy, with the initial aims only to halt comprehensivisation and shore-up the private sector (Chitty, 2004). In 1979 an Education Bill was passed cancelling the 1976 Act, which finally ended the to-and-fro with the message that comprehensivisation was no longer ‘national policy’ (Simon, 1991: 474). Yet where the government had a clear mandate, was in relation to its promise to develop an effective response to the continuing economic crisis of which the welfare state was identified as the core issue. For Keith Joseph, a major ideologue of what became known as the New Right (Barry, 2005), the idea that ‘the function of the state [was] to shift incomes and savings from the richer to the poorer members of society’ was ‘morally indefensible, misconceived in theory and repellent in practice’ (cited in Simon, 1991: 489). Indeed, the New Right was a shifting amalgam of both neo-liberal and neo-conservative strands of thought, and whilst the former was concerned with economic liberalism and the prioritisation of negative freedoms through the creation of ‘more market, less state’ (Ball, 1990: 76), the latter fretted over issues of authority, tradition, family, nation, and the social and moral order (Levitas, 2005). Taken together they formed ‘a coherent fusion of the economic and the social’ which hinged around a ‘strategy of inequality’ (Walker, 1990: 33, 35). The thrust of New Right arguments suggested that where the excessive taxation underpinning welfare services did not drive capital abroad in search of the higher profits from cheaper labour, lower taxation and greater pay differentiation, it suffocated and slowed the cycle of investment and profit vital to the nation’s strong economic growth, eventually causing the kind of recession then gripping the nation (Hickinson, 2005; Alcock, 1996). At the same time welfare services were seen to be hugely expensive and equally wasteful because their being ‘free at the point of use’ removed any need or incentive to reduce costs and operate efficiently (Alcock, 1996).

On top of this, as systems of ‘coercive transfers of income between individuals’ (Ball, 1990: 36), welfare states were not only seen to impinge upon individual freedoms, but also to encourage a welfare ‘dependency culture’ by removing incentives for society’s worst off to work (Hickinson, 2005). Indeed, for neo-conservatives welfare provision had replaced ‘personal initiative, independence and self respect’ with idleness and moral turpitude (Levitas, 2005: 15). By the 1980’s this had congealed into claims that Britain now had a substantial ‘underclass’ of people whose poverty and unemployment was explicable in terms of individual behaviour and/or a degenerate value system rather than social structures and processes (Welshman, 2006). At the same time, its egalitarianism was seen to have given people claim to



equal treatment and opportunities in a way which had undermined traditional forms of authority rooted in the hierarchical relations of family, gender and class which gave stability and order to society (Tomlinson, 2005). Indeed, Walker (1996: 5) points out that ‘rather than seeing inequality as potentially damaging to the social fabric, the Thatcher governments saw it as an engine of enterprise, providing incentives for those at the bottom as well as the top’. As the former benefitted by reaching for greater wealth, they would generate further benefits in terms of national economic growth and more employment opportunities, which would ‘trickle down’ to the latter, who would also have greater financial incentives to embrace work (Hickson, 2005).

In the long term, all this provided the basis for ‘a new common sense about policy’ (Walker, 1987: 184) and arguments that ‘what the public sector needed was a good dose of Darwinist thinking’ (Hartley, 2000, 116). Free and competitive markets in which companies were forced to compete for custom were seen as the mechanism by which they constantly strove for efficiency, cost-effectiveness, ever higher standards, and held managers and employees to account. Ideally then, public sector institutions were to be privatised, or at least made ‘cost effective’ via the introduction of competitive market principles into their organisation and structure (*ibid*). Moreover, such standards, responsiveness and efficiency were to be underpinned by active and engaged consumer-citizens freed from the stupor of dependency (Ball, 1997). However, more immediate responses were to cut taxes and slash fiscal spending, ‘tighten eligibility for benefits and reduce their value, deny the existence of poverty, suppress and abolish some of the key indicators of its extent, and blame the poor for their own situation’ (Levitas, 2005: 14). In 1981 unemployment had reached 2.6 million, and as poverty soared, English inner-cities such as Handsworth, Brixton and Toxteth rioted as tensions boiled (Tomlinson, 2005). Whilst the growing sense of crisis led Thatcher’s own cabinet to revolt, the outcome was a ‘radicalisation’ of her team, with Keith Joseph taking over at the DES (Simon, 1991). Ball (1990: 76) explains that the significance of Joseph’s impact lay in ‘establishing firm control over the ‘levers’ of education policy’. This meant wrestling them away from other partners within the ‘triangle of tension’, with the first targets being the independent semi-official bodies which offered advice and expressed views and concerns.

The Schools Council had been a particularly important institution, involving teachers in the development of a unified curriculum, yet with Joseph at the DES it was considered to be ‘too pro-teacher and plainly hostile to the department’. It was suddenly abolished in 1982 and replaced with two separate bodies for curriculum and examinations with staff directly

appointed by Joseph (Simon, 1991: 496). Now free to reject or accept proposals relating to both, in this area, the DES was now firmly ‘out on its own’ (*ibid*: 497). A year later the Association of Local Authority Education Committees was scrapped, and LEA’s were further weakened by the Education Act of 1986 which began removing their direct power and influence over schools. It legislated for the Local Management of Schools (LMS), and not only compelled LEA’s to pass the full control of budgets to schools themselves, but reduced the number of LEA board of governor appointments in favour of more parent governors, who were now also to take over and share the control of spending decisions, teacher recruitment, formal exclusions and curriculum policy along with headteachers. The Act also laid plans for a teacher appraisal scheme which would begin to link pay and performance by 1992.

Yet while the ‘discourse of derision’ had suggested that ‘both the moral and economic decline of Britain could be pinned on wholly minded progressive teachers’ (Hartley, 2000: 121), the main source of their misconduct was seen to lie within the university and college departments in which they were educated. Indeed, besides ‘conforming the existing teacher workforce’ (Hill, 2007: 209), government was also concerned to ensure that in future the ‘‘right kind’ of teachers were prepared’ (Crozier, 1999: 88). By 1985 the Advisory Committee on the Supply & Education of Teachers had been wound-up with the newly formed Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) had begun to take over. Prior to this Initial Teacher Education (ITE) had been delivered autonomously by university departments, and often involved an emphasis upon critique (Furlong, 2005). Courses had been key sites through which researchers, theorists and individual teacher educators could augment the knowledge and understanding of future practitioners (Hill, 2007). However, CATE was established to begin undermining this influence through its ability to oversee ITE courses and hold providers to account by recommending which ones the education secretary should accredit (Gilroy, 2002). Thus ‘Initial Teacher *Education*’ slowly became ‘Initial Teacher *Training*’ (ITT) as the emphasis shifted to a ‘new, ‘safe’, sanitised and detheorised’ means for producing future generations of teachers (Hill, 2007: 213).

A year before Conservative hopes for a third term in office, Thatcher replaced Joseph with Kenneth Baker and demanded a radical and coherent manifesto for education (Simon, 1991). Indeed, with key levers of reform now under central control, Baker was well placed to begin planning a ‘decisive break’ with post-war educational ideals (Griggs, 1989b: 51). In 1985 the No Turning Back Group (NTGB) had been established to defend Thatcherite *laissez faire* policy reforms, and as Baker successfully argued for funds for educational reform, their 1986

pamphlet set out ideas for the introduction of market forces into education, providing the backbone of the government's third educational election manifesto (Tomlinson, 2005). Just over a month after their re-election in June 1987 several 'consultation papers' covering the key aspects of what was called the 'Great Education Reform Bill' began to appear (Simon, 1991). Yet unlike previous major education reforms, rooted within years of consultation, debate, publications, and input from interested parties, a period of just two months was set aside (Tomlinson, 2005). The DES was inundated with protests, which fell upon deaf ears, with Baker himself commenting that 'the educational establishment... simply refuses to believe that the pursuit of egalitarianism' which 'left our national educational performance limping along behind that of our industrial competitors... is over' (cited in Simon, 1991: 540) .

***Ball & Brown: Educational and Cultural Differentiation.***

After a decade of academic pessimism and critique of the 'redemptive view' of education, a major study by Halsey *et al* (1980) only seemed to confirm that the hopes for post-war education had been misplaced. Indeed, using the educational and family biographies of 8,529 men to examine the impact of educational reforms between 1932 and 1972, they revealed that class differences in education remained as they had been in the 1920's, and that in the three decades since 1944, England and Wales had come no closer to the meritocratic ideal. However, their suggestion that the best hope for tackling these inequalities now lay with comprehensive reorganisation appeared to be born out in other research.

Revisiting the themes of differentiation and polarisation, Ball (1981) examined the impact of school processes upon the pupils of a co-educational comprehensive before and after its transition from banding to mixed-ability grouping. Using ethnographic techniques he echoed previous descriptions of the class-based pro- and anti-school subcultures which accompanied institutional divisions of pupils into bands. He also found that 'the normal way of discussing pupils among staff was in terms of singular and unitary characteristics - a categorical identification that tended to become a pejorative label' (*ibid*, 37). However, his analysis went further in flagging up the ways polarisation could occur not only between bands but within them. Moreover, rather than strictly fixed positions, pupils were able to adopt relatively flexible and ambivalent 'lines of adaption' in response to their ongoing experiences (*ibid*, 53). Whilst the pro-school pupils of the higher band could be fully supportive or utilitarian and calculative in their commitment to the school, the positions of the anti-school pupils of the lower band ranged from a passive insularity without active resistance to full rejection. As pupils' out-of-school leisure pursuits grew more independent of the family home, pop and

media based subcultural affiliations also began to provide value systems which conflicted with that of the school. Yet within school, commitment to these alternative systems differed by band and 'line of adaption', with the fully rejecting anti-school subculture in particular coming to depend less upon its relationship to the pro-school culture and its inversion, and more upon their wider subcultural orientations for their interpretation and rejection of schooling. However, with the introduction of mixed-ability grouping, the 'consciousness of kind' which processes of differentiation and polarisation produced amongst both pupils and staff was interrupted (*ibid*, 262). Indeed, rather than cohorts passing through ready-made divisions where contradictions of the accompanying labels and stereotypes tended to go unnoticed or be disregarded, teachers had to learn about, move, and split pupils up in a way which encouraged them to "make" rather than "take" their identities (*ibid*, 264). Within mixed-ability cohorts, Ball found less alienation and inter peer-group hostility, higher attendance, greater commitment to study and extra-curricular activity, and that the total rejection of school was limited to a few individuals rather than a coherent subculture.

Whilst Brown (1987) saw Ball's 'lines of adaption' as useful subdivisions within pro- and anti-school subcultures, he argued that the ultimate simplicity of linear 'bi-polar' models of working class pupils' responses to schooling failed to capture their full range and complexity. Within this, he saw theories of working class educational experience and outcomes that stressed either the importance of educational differentiation (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981), or class cultural differentiation (Willis, 1977), as being one-sided accounts that 'fail[ed] to listen to what the other is saying'. Against a backdrop of large-scale redundancy and industrial decline, the bulk of Brown's study centred on a co-educational comprehensive in a traditional working class neighbourhood in South Wales, and used a combination of both survey and ethnographic work to examine the educational orientations of lower, middle, and upper band pupils in their final year of schooling. Rather than 'a great parting of the waves, dividing those who conform to school from those who do not', Brown (*ibid*: 44, 66) identified three different working class 'frames of reference' (FOR's – class cultural lenses of future adult-occupational selves) based on pupils' 'rational calculation of what the school has to offer'. This led to three different ways of being in school – either 'rem', 'swot', or 'ordinary kid' – that were rooted in three different ways of becoming adult - based on FOR's that were either about 'getting *into*' the working class, 'getting *out*' of it, or 'getting *on*' within it.

Much like Willis' 'lad's', the lower band 'rem's' were a largely male minority who saw making an effort in school as an 'unfair exchange' given that it offered preparation for office

work rather than ‘real’ working class jobs (*ibid*, 73). In this respect, their FOR involved a class cultural response to school which was about ‘getting into’ a valued world of working class adults that educational differentiation failed to interrupt and reinforced rather than produced in a straightforward manner. This ‘alienated orientation’ to school stood in contrast to that of the working class ‘swots’ who formed a further minority of pupils in the upper stream. Whilst resembling Willis’ ‘ear’oles’, Brown rejected the idea that they were conformist dupes, instead finding that the majority of working class ‘swots’ exhibited a ‘normative instrumental orientation’. Indeed, with access to upper streams/knowledge/qualifications and a subsequent sense of academic ‘calling’ which fostered their sense of difference from other pupils, swots accepted the demands of school on the grounds that it was a necessary prelude/prerequisite of Further/Higher Education, and middle-class professional knowledge-based jobs (*ibid*: 83). In this respect, the school had a transformative impact on their FOR’s, underpinning an orientation to school based upon ‘getting out’ of the working class and into lives which are ‘educationally, occupationally and socially distinct from the majority of working class parents, neighbours and peers’ (*ibid*: 84, 105). Yet the majority of working class pupils were the ‘ordinary kids’ within middle streams. In neither accepting or rejecting school, they exhibited an ‘alienated instrumental orientation’ produced and maintained by a FOR in which school was valued only insofar as it was practically and instrumentally linked to their chances of ‘getting on’ (progressing) within the manual semi/skilled occupations fundamental to their perceived future social identities. As with the swots, this was also an authentic class cultural response to education – an attempt to exercise control over their lives in working class terms which educational differentiation again failed to challenge rather than simply produce. In the final instance, whilst together these three FOR’s re/produced mental/manual educational and occupational divides between classes, they also re/produced moral and social divisions of ‘the deserving and undeserving, the respectable and the rough’ within the working class (*ibid*, 95). Indeed, set against the perceived fecklessness of the rem’s, the ordinary kids’ ‘making an effort’ was a way in which they could maintain ‘their respect and dignity in an institution engaged in the sorting and selection of ‘talent’ which rewards people who are ‘not like us’ (i.e. swots)’. However, Brown suggested that against rising unemployment and industrial decline, the ‘effort-qualifications-jobs motivational sequence’ which has historically underpinned the compliance of the majority of working class pupils was under threat (*ibid*, 124). Whilst thereby foregrounding the importance of the political economy rather than supply (educational producers), the comprehensive ‘system’ nonetheless continued to politically be undermined.

Indeed, like earlier research, Ball (1981) had been unable to say whether there had been any marked improvement in academic attainment within the school he had studied. McKenzie (2001) points out that the fact that a majority of comprehensive schools in England and Wales were streamed and sat alongside a strong private sector also made the issue of attainment hard to judge at the national level. The first national and longitudinal analysis of the impact of comprehensive reorganisation emerged from Scotland where change had run much deeper and been more extensive (McPherson & Willms, 1987). Examining the attainment of 3 nationally representative cohorts whose transition to secondary schooling had been made before, during and after reorganisation, McPherson & Willms summarised their findings in terms of 'equalisation' and 'improvement'. Indeed, whilst the attainment of working class children had begun to equalise with that of their middle class counter-parts, there had been an overall improvement in the attainment of all children. They concluded that 'in a mere eight years, comprehensive organisation in Scotland significantly reduced social class inequalities of attainment that had been established over at least six decades' (*ibid*: 698). However, by this time policy had already begun to shift away from comprehensivisation and was about to make its decisive move.

### ***The 1988 Act and the Tightening of Control.***

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) introduced a quasi-marketised system of education where standards were to be driven up and educational 'producers' held accountable via competition between schools for both pupils and resources, while regulation and control by government ensured that the 'right type' of standards, values, traditions and ideas were being taught. It not only allowed parents to express a preference for the schools they wished their children to attend, but also linked parental choice to a per-capita funding system which provided the mechanism by which 'good' schools could attract and compete for more custom (pupils) and, subsequently, the funding to expand, while 'bad' schools would be unpopular and forced to either improve or wither away as their rolls and funding decreased (Ball, 2006). Whilst schools were given greater semi-independence from LEAs to enable them to begin 'remodelling along the lines of 'best' (i.e. efficient) commercial practice' (Mahoney & Hextall, 1997: 140), they were also given the option of balloting parents on whether to 'opt-out' of LEA control completely and become Grant Maintained (GM) schools funded directly by the DES. Furthermore, the development of a 'National Curriculum' (NC) not only satisfied conservatives that what schools taught was 'conservative enough' (Hill, 2007: 207), but also

allowed the new national system of testing<sup>10</sup> to provide standardised results that could be published for both individual schools and LEA's every year in national 'league tables'. This would provide 'product information' and 'measures of quality' upon which parents could judge schools (educational products), exercise their (consumer) choice, and thereby hold schools and teachers to account (Tomlinson, 2005).

For Brown (1995: 393) this 'third wave' in state education policy was aimed at creating a 'parentocracy' which allowed children's education to be steered by 'the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils'. In being consumer rather than producer-led, this in turn constituted a system of 'social selection by stealth' through which issues of authority and hierarchy could be resolved as differential parental choice making generated a satisfactory degree of educational diversification - 'different types of schools' for 'different types of mind/people' (*ibid*, 400). Alongside the greater relative freedoms afforded by LMS and to GM schools, the choice and diversity underpinning this nascent 'third wave' was to be further enhanced by the development of City Technology Colleges (CTC) for 11-18 year olds. Whilst government struggled for almost a decade to increase the numbers of GM schools<sup>11</sup> and a lack of sites and private backers limited the final number of CTCs to just 15, the generation of greater diversity of provision was later taken up much more successfully by a Labour Party whose process of self-reinvention was soon to accelerate under the leadership of Tony Blair (Ball, 2008).

In 1992 the fourth consecutive Conservative election win under the leadership of John Major allowed for the consolidation of the emergent system, which began with legislation for new school inspection arrangements. Indeed, whilst the introduction of a quasi-marketised education system animated by consumer choice had sought to generate powerful pressures upon producers to respond accordingly, this 'pull effect' was now to be complimented by further pressures designed to 'push' them into compliance. Despite the fact teachers regarded HMI as equitable in its criticism of both government and themselves (Chitty & Dunford, 1999), Education Secretary Clarke regarded it as 'part of the old educational establishment' (Ball, 2008: 78) and reduced its duties to a 'supervisory and administrative role' (Tomlinson, 2005: 58). An Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), with its chief appointed by the

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<sup>10</sup> Children were to be given nationally administered Standard Assessment Test's (SAT's) at three Key Stages (KS1, KS2 and KS3) at aged 7, 11 and 14, before taking subject based General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) at aged 16.

<sup>11</sup> By July of 1989 for example, only 20 out of some 3000 secondary schools were in the process of opting out (Simon, 1991).

Education Secretary, was to be the new and independent body through which schools would use a portion of their own budgets to hire contractors to inspect them every 4<sup>12</sup> years for 'quality of education, standards achieved, financial management and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children' (*ibid*). OfSTED could also 'recommend' where institutions might improve, 'insist on their implementation' (Hill, 2001: 143), and 'deliberately... delimit the degree of interpretation available' (Furlong *et al*, 2000: 8). Besides ensuring that the majority of criticism would now fall upon schools and teachers (Chitty & Dunford, 1999), OfSTED inspections were intended to provide 'a means of increasing accountability with conformity to the spirit of the letter of government regulations' (Furlong, 2001: 130).

As a key mechanism for policing the new system, the place and role of OfSTED was still firmly rooted in the 'discourse of derision', and this same unrelenting suspicion and distrust of educational producers continued to springboard legislation in other areas. Speaking at the first annual party conference of their fourth term, Major insisted that 'teachers should learn how to teach children to read, not waste time on the politics of gender, race and class (cited in Tomlinson, 2005: 56). Indeed, whilst CATE had already been established to begin undermining such influences upon future generations of teachers during their ITT, Furlong (2001: 119) points out that policymakers 'frequently found that their intentions had not been fully realised', and there were subsequently 'constant calls for further and more stringent reforms'. In 1994 the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) was created to take over CATE's responsibilities for the 'funding and quality control of teacher education' (Gewirtz, 2000: 356). However, besides developing an even more tightly prescribed national system of ITT (Hill, 2007), it was also given the means to ensure teacher educators were compliant. Indeed, funding was to be linked to 'quality' on the basis of course ratings given by OfSTED who were now to take full responsibility for inspecting courses (Gilroy, 2002). By 1998 the national media were using OfSTED inspection reports to publish 'league tables' of ITT courses, and 'university departments and colleges of HE were labelled as 'very good, good, average or poor'' (Tomlinson, 2005: 112). OfSTED scores thereby had 'a direct impact upon a department's income... and staffing' (Gilroy, 2002: 247), and in a similar way to schools, provided the key mechanism by which 'rapid conformity was encouraged' (Furlong, 2001: 28).

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<sup>12</sup> Extended to every 6 years in 1997.



In 1996 further legislation extended OfSTED's duties to include the inspection of LEA's, while several other Acts dealt with disability, student loans, and nursery education. While at this point Conservatives were soon to be replaced in government, their reforms had not only succeeded in developing an educational infrastructure which hung together as a coherent package of interlocking policies, but had radically altered the terrain of public service provision which Blair's 'New' Labour Party would inherit (Ball, 2008). Yet whilst Blair's re-invention of the party had been about making it capable of gaining a parliamentary majority for more than one term, this had meant broadening its appeal to the electorate via alterations in its political philosophy and the assertion of the 'new right wing of the Labour Party' (Beech, 2004: 86). As Tomlinson (2005: 88) points out, in March 1997 'the political parties went into the general election campaign... with education manifestos that were remarkably similar, and differences rapidly became similarities. Education policy indicated more continuity than discontinuity after May 1997'.

Moreover, other than Conservative efforts to concentrate discussions of poverty and unemployment within a pathologised and undeserving 'underclass', by the mid-1990's class had by and large disappeared from all party political rhetoric. Despite the fact that the Conservative strategy of inequality had generated profound increases in wealth, poverty and inequality (Connell, 1994; Westergaard, 1994), the cultural turn and variants of post-modern social theory had also seen the concept of class slip off the academic agenda (Mac an Ghaill, 1996). Whilst concerns for a measure of social justice reappeared with the election of New Labour, they were to be articulated through what Youdell (2006: 11) has described as 'a new conceptual category for thinking about – or perhaps more accurately not thinking about – inequality': social exclusion.

# 3

## **Social Exclusion, Class & Education: An Analysis of New Labour.**

### ***Introduction.***

This chapter follows on from the last in covering the years since New Labour's election win in 1997. Yet whilst it continues with the study's key themes of class, education policy and structure, the teaching profession, and the various ways in which the (re)production of class-based inequalities within and through education have been understood within research, it does so specifically in relation to the concept of social exclusion. After a brief discussion of social exclusion's conceptual history, the remainder of the chapter is divided into two broad sections. The first explores a number of models and ways of thinking about social exclusion which provide a means of tracking its many and shifting meanings. It then moves on to a detailed consideration of New Labour's political philosophy, and the particular ways in which education has become central to a new landscape of welfare and social justice which marries concerns for both social inclusion and a strong economy. Section two shifts the spotlight onto the specific contours and layers of the educational policy regime, pulling out overlapping and contradictory logics and placing them alongside sociological research which has sought to explore the implications for the continuing (re)production of class-based inequalities within and through education.

### ***Social Exclusion: A Brief Conceptual History.***

As a distinct set of policy concepts, social exclusion and inclusion first emerged in France during the 1980s, and have since become a leading policy paradigm within the European Union (EU) and across member states. Despite occasional appearances in the 1960's as an alternative label for 'the poor', it was through the work of René Lenoir (1974) a decade later that the idea of '*les exclus*' (the excluded) began to take hold (Silver, 1994). He argued that along with the elderly and disabled, rapid post-war urbanisation had left up to 10% of the population isolated from mainstream society in a way which fundamentally undermined the egalitarian model of citizenship at the heart of French Republicanism (Davies, 2005).

Yet it was the widening of the concept during the economic turmoil of the late 1970's and 1980's to incorporate the greater numbers of people experiencing chronic unemployment

which made it a central feature of academic and political debates (Beland, 2007). Whilst it remained a profoundly moral issue relating to the political and socio-cultural cohesion of society (Silver, 1994), it was a lack of labour market opportunities and corresponding potential for social isolation which were increasingly seen to be the major threats to solidarity and the unity of society and state (Beland, 2007; Levitas, 2005). In France employment has been intimately bound to notions of solidarity and citizenship, with earnings-related social protection payments and benefits also being occupationally-based (Silver, 1994). In this respect, higher levels of long-term unemployment and increased job insecurity were not only seen to be severing many of those affected – particularly young people and new immigrant communities – from the socially and morally integrative benefits of employment, but simultaneously compounding their situation with higher rates of poverty arising from insufficient levels of social protection (Beland, 2007). Problems of rising unemployment and poverty were thereby ‘construed as manifestations of ‘social exclusion’ or ‘a rupture of the social bond’ which in turn undermined solidarity as a value and unity maintained through full and active participation (Silver & Wilkinson 1995: 3).

It was parallel to this that the EU’s ‘social dimension’ came to prominence in the late 1980’s, and, in a similar way, the cohesion and integration of its citizens as fundamental underpinnings of the Union’s wider economic and political project also became a prime concern (Mayes, 2001: 9). As the language of exclusion began to journey beyond France and become a staple of EU policy documents and debates, it also proved to be a way to avoid alienating other member-states such as the UK where the language of poverty had been jettisoned (Room, 1995; Burchardt *et al*, 2002; Hills, 2004; Lister, 2004). The EU also conceptualised social exclusion and inclusion primarily in terms of ex/inclusion in relation to paid employment (Lister 2000; Levitas, 2005). Yet as the concepts continued their migration into national settings, they were refracted by existing political, cultural, social and academic milieu (Levitas, 2005). In the UK context, whilst there had been substantial academic engagement in pan-European debates (Room, 1995), it was only after social cohesion appeared as a new ‘thematic priority’ of the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) in 1995 that it began to evolve into a major research agenda at national level. Indeed, in France academics and others had long debated the conceptual and paradigmatic issues of social exclusion before it formed a major policy blueprint (Beland, 2007). In contrast, the language of social exclusion was imported to the UK primarily through the political realm by New Labour, and thereby came to underpin policy shifts before similar debates could unfold (Byrne, 2005; Lister, 2004).

Following New Labour's 1997 election win, social exclusion and inclusion became the dominant language of disadvantage, opportunity and welfare provision in the UK. Established on the heels of their victory, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was the interdepartmental organisation responsible for the development and coordination of anti-exclusion policies. It defined social exclusion as 'a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown' (SEU, 1997). The explicit recognition that 'joined-up problems' required 'joined-up solutions' meant that inclusion and exclusion were rapidly 'mainstreamed' as government ministries, departments, Local Authorities (LA's) and voluntary agencies became galvanized around the terms (Levitas, 2005: 190; Bagley *et al*, 2004). The language of social exclusion subsequently filtered into increasing amounts of research, and even those who rejected it were forced to engage with it critically (Beland, 2007). Yet despite having intersected with the peculiarities of the UK national context, at the policy level social exclusion continued to be understood largely as exclusion from paid employment (Levitas, 2005; Lister, 2000, 2004; Byrne, 2005). By 2006, inclusion and exclusion had gathered a momentum and degree of embeddedness within policy stretching beyond the SEU, and the unit was superseded by a more narrowly focused Social Exclusion Task Force (SETF) responsible for dealing with 'the problems experienced by those facing the most entrenched and complex exclusion' (SETF, 2006).

## **Section 1: Analytical Frameworks & Political Discourse.**

### ***Tracking & Mapping Meaning.***

The conceptual prevalence of social exclusion and inclusion did not constitute a convergence in terms of meaning (Hills, 2004). Indeed, despite their ubiquity, the meaning of the terms remained notoriously vague and protean, with different and often overlapping sets of empirical problems and policy solutions attached to particular readings (Silver, 1994; Levitas, 1998; Fairclough, 2000). There remains a strong sense in which inclusion was presented and presents itself as an inherently benign and 'unconditional good' (Edwards *et al*, 2001: 417). In this respect, Edwards *et al* (2001) have urged researchers wishing to work with the concept to do so in a cautious and critical way, sharing Alexiadou's (2005: 107) concerns that 'in an inegalitarian society the use of the language of opportunity in an uncritical way serves to legitimate rather than challenge existing relations of domination'. Indeed, whilst there is often a degree of recognition that social exclusion is - or was initially - linked to the transition to post-industrial society (Byrne, 2005; Beland, 2007; Davies, 2005), this was typically joined or

superseded by explanations that pointed to the cultural and personal deficits of the excluded themselves (Levitas, 1998, 2005; Lister, 2004). Moreover, the terms carry an implicit social geometry in which hierarchically ordered societies cross-cut by inequalities and divisions of class, 'race', gender, disability, sexuality and age, are potentially recast as societies of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Fairclough, 2000). Thus the latent simplicity of the societal imagery conjured by the terms lends itself to readings in which exclusion not only becomes severed from wider social processes and constructed as *the* key social division and 'moral disgrace', but is also reduced to a problem of 'how to help, cajole, or coerce the outsiders over some perceived hurdle into the mainstream' (Levitas, 2004: 47).

In this respect, Veit-Wilson (1998) has made an important analytical distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' versions of social exclusion. The former locates the site of change within 'the excluded' if inclusion is to be achieved, while the latter focuses on combating those processes and actions beyond 'the excluded' that generate their exclusion and inhibit inclusion. These 'weak' and 'strong' versions can in turn be mapped onto Steinert's (2003: 45) analysis of the way in which narrow conceptualisations of social exclusion are rooted within an 'horizontal' image of an 'insider/outsider' society in which social divisions become irrelevant against 'the new social ideal... to stay 'inside'', and, on the other hand, broader 'hierarchical' images in which societies are ordered by the social divisions and inequalities produced and maintained by the interplay between 'domination and submission, luxury and poverty, idleness and over-work, ownership and lack of means, influence and powerlessness'.

Levitas' (1998) distillation of the complex discursive currents that constitute the social/inclusion framework into ideal-types brings greater clarity to the practical implications which stem from weak/horizontal and strong/hierarchical versions of exclusion. RED (a redistributive discourse) can be seen as relating to stronger/hierarchical versions of social exclusion in its emphasis upon poverty and inequality as root causes of exclusion. As structurally produced phenomena, RED calls for policies that redistribute wealth and power, and thereby makes demands of the 'included' as relationally bound to the position of 'the excluded'. In contrast, MUD (moral underclass discourse) and SID (social integrationist discourse) are both rooted within weaker/horizontal versions in which 'the excluded' are distinguished by either their own inter-generationally transmitted cultural and moral deficits which function as a form of self-exclusion (MUD), and/or by a lack of paid employment as the key marker of 'insider' status (SID). From the perspectives of MUD and SID, policy solutions lie in changing those characteristics of 'the excluded' deemed to be the cause of their

separation from the rest of society. Whilst varying aspects of all these distinctions were present within New Labour's policy curricula, there was a degree of 'logical' interaction between them when mapped onto the contours of its wider political project.

***New Labour: Globalisation, Education & and the Changing Politics of Welfare.***

Fairclough (2000) suggests that grasping the political logic of New Labour hangs upon its readings of the global economy. In this respect the key message was that of an unprecedented internationalisation of both production and finance (Wilkinson, 2000; Gray, 2000). This related to the ease with which production, services and employment can be moved to where conditions are most favourable, and capital's ability to wash in and out of national settings in search of profit (Shaw, 2007). Like other governments, New Labour's response had been firmly rooted within a 'discourse of inevitability': a necessarian logic which constructs this version of economic globalisation as an unavoidable given to which they must respond (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001). The inability of governments to control both the flow of jobs and capital has been seen to undercut their capacity to control interest and exchange rates (Shaw, 2007), and in turn dissolved all possibility of 'Old Labour' mainstays such as Keynesian economic management (Lund, 2002). Leggott (2005: 24, emphasis added) notes that despite the existence of much counterevidence, in terms of political (in)action 'what matters here is the version of economic globalisation New Labour *chooses* to invoke'. Indeed, New Labour consequently abandoned efforts to 'constrict the market for a social purpose' (Chadwick & Heffernan, 2003: 8). As Lund (2002: 192) points out, the financial logic of 'new times' holds that 'the global economy would undo quickly any attempt by a national government to change its outcomes, and [that] resistance to global forces would produce economic stagnation'. In these 'new times', governments must tailor national structures to accommodate flows of capital and production and realign and restrict their policies to those which will attract and retain them (Wilkinson, 2000).

Yet as a cornerstone of New Labour's modernisation, these global economic conditions also merged and mingled with an important set of electoral considerations (Plant, 2004; Hay, 1999). Indeed, the same global forces have been seen to have disrupted the size, cohesion, concerns and identity of the working class and de-aligned their politics (Roberts 2001; Shaw, 2007). By the mid 1990's the working class had all but disappeared from political rhetoric as sights were set squarely upon becoming a 'catch all party, catering for 'hard working families' and 'the poor', and the 'populist middle ground' (Tomlinson, 2005: 166). This parallel imperative fed into and underscored the party's desire to shed its anachronistic economic image as a 'tax and

spend' party (Hay, 1999). Yet becoming a 'catch all party' effectively involved a complex 'double shuffle' in which a dominant neo-liberal logic favouring one class was tempered by policies that disguised and obscured the nature and implications of its thrust and confused 'the social democratic constituency about New Labour's fundamental character' (Levitas, 2004: 42). At the heart of this was the reinterpretation of the traditional and leading Labour core value of equality (Lister, 2007; Callinicos, 2000).

Analysing equality in relation to New Labour's politics, Beech (2004, 2006) drew upon a distinction between several different conceptualisations. Whilst the first relates to 'strict egalitarianism' and the state's role in the abolition of inequality, the second is a 'sufficiency' model referring to the duty of states to provide the minimum required for survival. Overlapping with this is a third and more relative model of strict and non-strict 'priority' conceptualisations. Whereas the former is concerned with improving the situation of society's worst-off 'no matter how well-off they are in absolute terms', in the latter this prioritisation 'becomes less important the better off the worst off groups become' (Beech, 2006: 171). Whilst it is questionable that 'Old Labour' ever held a commitment to strict egalitarianism, again, what is important is that New Labour's political (in)actions were rooted in a clear counter-positioning of itself *vis a vis* such a caricature (Leggott, 2005; Shaw, 2007; Beech, 2004, 2006). From the outset, Blair (1998: 30) argued that 'Old Labour' had 'stifled opportunity' in its pursuit of 'abstract equality', and at the same time had confused it with social justice (Blair & Schröder, 1999: 11). Gordon Brown (1999: 135) stated that the party had rejected 'equality of outcome not because it is too radical but because it is neither desirable nor feasible'. Effort and responsibility were seen to have gone unrewarded and, along with creativity, initiative, excellence and diversity, had been replaced by mediocrity and uniformity (Blair & Schröder, 1999; Brown, 1999).

Yet beyond this, commitments to equality were less transparent (Callinicos, 2000; Beech, 2004, 2006; Lister, 2007). Crucially, this owed much to the fact that social exclusion and inclusion emerged as the party's 'more or less systematic alternative to egalitarianism' (Gray, 2000: 19). Indeed, for Giddens (1998: 100) this alternative clearly involved reading 'equality as inclusion and inequality as exclusion'. Yet Gray (2000: 22) suggests that such a conflation is misleading given that '[s]upporters of social inclusion do not pursue an ideal of egalitarian justice, but an ideal of common life' which will deplore many but not all inequalities. New Labour's notion of 'sufficiency' was nonetheless more generous than New Right concerns for absolute poverty, incorporating adequate levels of income and access to services at the same

time (Hills, 1998; Beech, 2004). This was perhaps most evident in New Labour's commitment to a national Minimum Wage. Yet this conceptualisation of equality immediately overlaps with a non-strict 'prioritarianism' whereby New Labour focused attention on the inequalities of society's worst-off and concerns petered out as they are curbed (Beech, 2006). Various forms of single parent/family Tax Credit and New Deals for the unemployed are examples of such policies, which prioritised society's worst-off up to a certain level. In turn, whilst both strands can be positioned within RED, the longer-term policy aims were firmly rooted in SID. Moreover, when taken together, they essentially encapsulated a concern for achieving equality up to a certain threshold beyond which inequalities could continue unfettered (Shaw, 2007; Beech, 2004, 2006). In this respect, New Labour's version of (in)equality as ex/inclusion can be understood in relation to Steinert's (2003) horizontal model of exclusion in which vertical lines of inequality which are long and complex disappear in the dichotomous imagery of an insider/outsider society.

Yet where New Labour was more explicit and clear about equality was in its commitment to equality of opportunity. Indeed, inequality as social exclusion was largely conceived of by the party as an absence of opportunity (Plant, 1999; Hickson, 2005). In this respect, a just society was seen to hinge around the core values of 'equal worth, opportunity for all, responsibility and community' (Blair, 1998: 29). Whilst equal worth was largely discussed in relation to the discrimination and disadvantages faced by women, ethnic minorities, the elderly and disabled (Blair, 1998; Blair & Schröder, 1999), it was on grounds such as these that all were seen to 'deserve to be given an equal chance in life to fulfil the potential with which they were born' (Gordon Brown, 1999: 134). New Labour thereby rejected a 'narrow' equality of opportunity which evaporated after the age of 16 in favour of one which was 'recurrent, lifelong, and comprehensive' (Gordon Brown, in Callinicos, 2000: 38).

This conceptualisation of social justice as equality of opportunity was fundamental to New Labour's attempts to chart a Third Way between or beyond the 'stifling statism of the Old Left' and the 'hard' neo-liberalism of the New Right (Power & Whitty, 1999: 535). An important step in the germination of this approach was the conclusion of the party's Commission on Social Justice Report (1994: 223) that social justice and strong economic growth and efficiency were 'two sides of the same coin'. New Labour subsequently sought to develop a kind of 'supply-side egalitarianism' in which the generation of opportunities to achieve in the labour market took precedence over and structured the redistribution of resources (Streeck, 2000: 253). This entailed shifting from a passive to an active and



preemptive welfare system (Powell, 2000), and the reinvention of the state as a 'social investment state' (Giddens, 1998; Esping-Anderson, 2002; Lister, 2006). The key endeavour was to raise the nations stock of human capital so as to create the kind of 'magnet economy' believed to attract jobs and investment (Brown & Lauder, 2006: 25). In this respect, New Labour sought to 'rebuild the welfare state around work' (DSS, 1998: 23), with paid-employment seen as the lynchpin for both 'economic prosperity' and 'individual fulfilment' (Brown, 1999: 136). Indeed, in the 'age of human capital', it is not only individual economic success/failure, but the fate of entire neighbourhoods, communities and national economies which depend upon 'how extensively and effectively people invest in themselves' (Becker, 2006: 292). Education was thus identified as a key mechanism to ensure economic competitiveness *and* combat social exclusion: vital not only for national and global economic futures, but an integral part of the life-course as a means by which individuals could avoid (long-term) unemployment and all its concomitant disadvantages.

In embracing a political economy in which measures of social justice must be reconcilable with the inescapable logic of the global market, New Labour's emphasis upon human capital development via increased opportunity can be understood in terms of Veit-Wilson's (1998) 'weak' version of exclusion. Indeed, its commitment to supply-side egalitarianism essentially side stepped serious macro-political engagement with processes and relations beyond the excluded and instead viewed inclusion as dependent upon effecting changes within the excluded themselves (Byrne, 2005). However, in seeking to combat exclusion via the acquisition of educational qualifications and labour market (re)integration, New Labour's approach can also be clearly located within SID. Yet within all this, understandings of exclusion can also slide between and be filtered through MUD, which owes much to the importance New Labour placed upon its two remaining and interrelated core values of community and responsibility.

Indeed, in contrast to prior Conservative retreats from collective entities, New Labour had embraced an instrumental communitarianism which was again seen to serve additional positive functions for both economy *and* individual (Levitas, 1998, 2004; Fairclough, 2000; Davies, 2005). At the local level, community was viewed as a mechanism through which individuals could cope and adapt to the new conditions created by socio-economic change (Davies, 2005). At the national level, it underpinned the unity and cohesiveness fundamental to the UK's survival and success in the global marketplace (Levitas, 2004). For Blair (in Fairclough, 2000: 28), this was Britain's *raison d'état*, 'a matter of national purpose and pride' demanding that

‘the whole nation... put its shoulder to the wheel’. Across all occupations, work was seen as a kind of national service (Fairclough, 2000), with the integration of the excluded through paid employment providing further momentum to the productivity and survival of the nation (Davies, 2005). Yet as Fairclough (2000: 34) explained, within such a discourse ‘the divisions and inequalities which have been a primary reference for centre-left politics in the past virtually disappear... New Labour is inclusive and consensual... there are no sharp internal divisions, no ‘us’ and ‘them’, no enemies’. In this respect, community reaffirmed a horizontal view of society in which the key and most problematic dividing line ran between those in/excluded within/from the national purpose and the accompanying benefits of involvement. This further underpinned a weak version of exclusion by again displacing serious macro-political engagement with an emphasis upon managing socio-economic problems through the nation’s supply-side (Byrne, 2005).

Yet whilst community was seen to function as a form of collective self-help which contributed to the greater good of the nation, being part of a community was also seen to entail responsibilities (Fairclough, 2000). Thus alongside a commitment to opportunities and an ‘obligation by Government to pursue them relentlessly’ (Brown, in Callinicos, 2000: 38), a corresponding emphasis was placed upon the personal responsibility of people to seize them (Alexiadou, 2005). Indeed, for New Labour a person’s full capacity could only be realised through society and its various institutions (Davies, 2005). This in turn demanded certain duties from citizens if such institutions were to continue functioning as conduits for the enablement of others (*ibid*). Yet it was families which were seen to be society’s core institutions and the building blocks of the strong and cohesive communities vital for the nation’s future success (Byrne, 2005). Indeed, recalibrating welfare around work and bringing more shoulders to the wheel involved the fostering of a ‘can do’ work ethic underpinned by a reinvigorated family ethic (Davies, 2005). Families were seen to teach interpersonal commitment, responsibility, discipline, respect and assist and support in the navigation of crises and opportunities for the fulfilment of individual potential (Levitas, 2005). In this respect, a breakdown in family life was seen to have fed into community disintegration and accompanying rises in crime and disorder which further perpetuated their decline and disempowering effects (*ibid*). However, as Gillies (2005a: 387) pointed out, ‘from this perspective prosperity derives from being the right kind of self, while poverty and disadvantage is associated with poor self-management’. Indeed, whilst the aggravation of inexorable global forces is acknowledged, amidst a prevailing weak/horizontal version of exclusion which deemphasises serious macro-political involvement and obscures lines of

inequality, difficulties associated with the generation of inclusion through paid employment (SID) are easily construed as symptoms of deficient socialisation and pathological cultures (MUD). Yet it was primarily parents who found themselves at the centre of such discourse (Gillies, 2005a, 2005b; Gewirtz, 2001). Indeed, given educational marketisation has institutionalised a blurring of the boundaries between home and school, parenting has been reconstructed as an 'educational enterprise' in which loving and safeguarding one's child includes taking responsibility for their academic development (Ericsson & Larsen, 2002: 93), with subsequent successes or failures dependent upon parental attitudes and the activities they undertake (or fail to) (Alldred *et al*, 2002).

Clarke (2006: 702) points out that 'investment in children's well-being and education represents the epitome of prudent long-term investment, promising to save on future expenditure by avoiding the costs of future social exclusion'. In this respect, as education was increasingly constructed as a 'wonder drug' for tackling 'a wide range of educational, social and political ills' (Coffield, 1999: 479), it in turn came to represent 'by far the largest 'social policy' investment in poor neighbourhoods' (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005: 213). However, such investment took place alongside the wider logic of earlier educational reforms, which were significantly widened and deepened by New Labour. Indeed, whilst the Conservative neoliberal state had begun the break-up of a comprehensive and professional national system within the context of economic crises and deindustrialisation, New Labour operated within the new knowledge economy as a 'managerial or competitive state' and saw through the final dissolution of a nationally coherent system (Ball, 2008: 57).

## **Section 2: Tensions & Contradictions.**

### ***New Labour Education Policy.***

By the time John Major's Conservative government left office, the pace and extent of educational change had produced what McKenzie (2001) describes as 'innovation fatigue' amongst those responsible for its implementation. Yet despite the fact that New Labour's arrival signalled a shift in the 'triangle of tension' (with an emphasis upon new partnerships characterised by a balance of high expectations and support (Whitty, 2008)), during its first term educational reform was nonetheless set to intensify (Tomlinson, 2005). Indeed, the party's winning election manifesto positioned education as its top priority (Labour Party, 1997), and by 2008 it had coordinated an unprecedented 60% rise in educational spending and overseen an unparalleled welter of education policy (Shaw, 2007; Ball, 2008).

At the outset, the broad sweep of New Labour's plans were outlined in the White Paper, *'Excellence in Schools'* (DfEE, 1997). Whilst stating that education was to be about 'investing in human capital in the age of knowledge... to compete in the global economy' (*ibid*: 3), it also revealed that the majority of Conservative reforms were to remain intact (Tomlinson, 2005). Based upon six key principles, the first restated education as being at the heart of government, while the second asserted that education would be for the many rather than the few. The third statement that standards rather than structures needed to change if 'standards' were to improve owed much to an acceptance of messages from School Improvement & Effectiveness Research (SIER) which left New Labour 'convinced that background disadvantage could be overcome by sheer effort within the schooling system' (Shaw, 2007: 77). Whilst the earlier theoretical and pessimistic turn within the sociology of education had alienated many policy-makers and practitioners (Shain & Ozga, 1996), from the 1980's onwards SIER's optimism and rejection of such work represented the "bringing of good news" and offered a "can do" approach to educational problems' (Mac an Ghail, 1996: 168). Beginning with the observation that schools serving similar areas could often produce different educational outcomes, SIER re-centred schools in academic analyses, attempting to 'identify techniques and procedures' that could be 'applied directly to any educational or management situation' in an effort to raise 'standards' (Angus, 1993: 335). Yet in attempting to focus attention solely upon the 'domain of school factors' (Harris & Ranson, 2005: 341), SIER had 'superficially supported the political message that 'poverty is no excuse'' (Tomlinson, 2005: 170). Such a belief underpinned the establishment of a Standards & Effectiveness Unit, which was now to oversee the setting and reaching of targets via an assortment of task forces. In this respect, not only were competition and choice to remain intact, they were to be enhanced by the public availability of data in conjunction with other new surrogates for price as indicators of product quality such as results generated by the new and challenging school development plans to be worked out by LEA's in the drive for higher standards. Despite the fact that few comprehensives had ever achieved mixed-ability grouping, the Paper also formally endorsed setting by ability and proposed that the top 5% of school intakes be designated Gifted & Talented and given higher levels of support.

The fourth principle stated that intervention in schools was to be inverse to success, and besides continuing its tough regime of quality inspection, OfSTED was to identify 'excellent' schools to become 'Beacon Schools' which would share advice and innovations with other schools in return for extra funding. Diversity of provision was to be enhanced by allowing

improving schools to apply for funding for subject specialist status and select up to 10% of their intakes by aptitude. However, achieving specialist status also required schools to raise £50,000 pounds to be matched by government, thereby barring struggling schools or those unable to raise the capital (Tomlinson, 2005). Diversity was also bolstered by the assertion that parents of grammar school children were to take responsibility for deciding their future via a complex system of balloting. Besides their selectivity having both a direct and indirect impact on around 15% of all secondary aged children, the fact that just 1% of their intakes received Free School Meals (FSM's) sat oddly with claims that they continued to provide 'ladders of opportunity' for all children (Tomlinson, 2005). Indeed, as Shaw (2007: 63) points out, the 'balloting solution' essentially meant that a system of schools deeply implicated in the perpetuation of 'privilege and class inequality was now – for the first time in Labour's history – fully and formally accepted'.

Yet the focus upon excellence, improvement and standards was inevitably shadowed by concern for 'failing' schools (Ball, 2008), with the fifth principle thereby warning there would be zero tolerance for those schools identified as such by OfSTED. 'Failing' schools could be placed in 'Special Measures' whereby managers, staff and governors were replaced and multiple, short-notice inspections made. Where problems persisted, schools could be closed under a new 'Fresh Start' initiative and reopened with a new name and new staff. Negative and scornful media coverage of 'failing' schools consistently overlooked the fact that over two thirds of them served working class and ethnic minority groups in disadvantaged areas (Tomlinson, 2005 Gorard, 2005). The Paper also announced plans for Education Action Zones (EAZ's), and in an effort to 'bring new 'energy' and 'creativity' into the system' (Ball, 2008: 121), the initiative was to involve community-rooted public/private/voluntary partnerships in the development of action plans for educational improvement in disadvantaged areas. Yet as part of the wider battle against social exclusion, whilst EAZ's were expected to find 'radical and innovative solutions' (Blair, in Whitehead & Clough, 2004: 216), they were limited by the fact that they were also 'not to interfere with existing assessment regimes and performance targets' (Power *et al*, 2004: 462). Moreover, whilst the redistributive character of EAZ's pulled in a different direction to rest of the Paper, the development of Zones and the allocation of resources was to be decided by competitive bidding, which effectively meant that the most disadvantaged localities were not necessarily covered (Power & Gewirtz, 2001: 43). At the same time, Hodgson & Spours (1999: 133) suggested that whilst harbouring the 'potential to make a practical difference to the most excluded groups in society', EAZ's ultimately lacked 'the power to challenge the structure of the education and training system as a whole'. Indeed,

later assessments found that the success of the scheme had been ‘limited and patchy’, and that any educational gains appeared to have been made via the targeting of efforts towards those hovering just below important performance thresholds (Power *et al*, 2004: 453). Finally, whilst the sixth key proposal was that new educational partnerships should be sought, drives for collaboration and partnership between schools sat awkwardly alongside imperatives for them to also have to compete in the educational marketplace (Adnett & Davies, 2003; Cardini, 2006).

Yet the majority of these proposals became law via the 1998 School Standards & Frameworks Act, which, despite the earlier White Papers mantra of ‘standards not structures’, also focused upon the structures of schooling. In this respect, it clarified the categories and nature of state schooling and stated that a new system of ‘Community’ (council), ‘Foundation’ (former GM schools), and ‘Voluntary Aided’ (faith) schools would sit alongside the existing system of ‘public’ and private schools, grammar schools, ‘comprehensives’, specialist schools and CTCs. This further endorsed a ‘divided and divisive’ system characterised by variations in funding, privileges, and selection procedures (Tomlinson, 2005: 101). Soon after, the creation of a new ministerial post for Inner City Education was timed to coincide with ‘Excellence in Cities’ (EiC) (DfEE, 1999), an further initiative targeting ‘failing’ urban schools and low levels of aspiration. Whilst EiC’s were to dissolve and absorb EAZ’s, they continued with the line that schools could improve irrespective of the wider socio-economic contexts in which they were immersed (Tomlinson, 2005). Moreover, whilst the programme attempted to develop school partnerships and redistribute resources by need rather than competitive bidding, most of its initiatives were targeted at individual groups of pupils (Evans *et al*, 2005). Indeed, while EiC’s brought many improvements in IT facilities, the programme essentially encouraged greater intra-institutional selection and setting with Learning Support Units and Learning Mentors for disruptive and ‘low ability’ pupils, and increased extra-curricular opportunities, summer schools and high status testing regimes for those identified as Gifted & Talented (Tomlinson, 2005: 125). Moreover, from the year 2000 the Fresh Start programme for seriously ‘failing’ schools was to be replaced by the ‘City Academies’ programme. Academies were to be an entirely new category of school run in partnership between central government and energetic and innovative private sponsors (Ball, 2008). For just £2 million, sponsors could obtain ownership of land and a newly constructed building, be able to appoint the majority of governors, and exercise flexibility with regards management, ethos, staffing/pay, curriculum and timetabling in an effort to tackle ‘failure’ (Hatcher, 2006). Whilst they were also assigned specialist status, given that most sponsors were business or faith based, Academies were

allowed to select 10% of their intakes by faith as well as aptitude. By 2005 there were 50 such schools with plans to expand the number to 400 (Woods *et al*, 2007). Two cross-party committee reports were openly critical of such an expansion given the lack of evidence that Academies raised standards (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004, 2005). They also drew attention to the fact that Academies appeared to be permanently excluding pupils at higher rates than other schools, and Gorard (2005) argued that it was still unclear as to whether touted improvements were attributable to Academies themselves or their selectivity, greater hype and attention and/or resources. For Tomlinson (2005: 104), they did little more than add ‘to the hierarchical pecking order of schools which unsurprisingly, given the history of English schooling, continued to mirror the social class structure’.

In turn, concerns about teacher incompetence also underpinned a continuing preoccupation with the modernisation of the teaching profession. Tomlinson (2005: 111) points out that the low status of the profession and accompanying recruitment problems were not helped by comments from the head of the TTA that teacher training was ‘not an academic study and not an intrinsic part of HE’. This was subsequently followed by massive recruitment drives coupled with financial incentives to attract a new generation of teachers. Parallel to this was the development of a national professional qualification for headteachers in 1997 and a National College for School Leadership in 1999, with both stemming from the great faith placed in the idea that determined and charismatic heads could turn schools around against the odds (*ibid*). Plans were also developed for a new structure of career and pay progression by the year 2000 in which pay and responsibilities would be attached to the crossing of key ‘thresholds’ in a new appraisal system (DfEE, 1998). This was followed by the introduction of English and maths tests for trainees in 2001 in an effort to raise teaching standards. While in Scotland standards continued to rise without such testing (Tomlinson, 2005), their only quantifiable impact in England appeared to be a fall in recruitment amongst minority groups (Mahoney, 2001). The tighter control of teacher education by the TTA was also expanded to include Continuing Professional Development and the training of new Teaching Assistants (TA’s) intended to help reduce teachers’ workload.

Whilst for secondary education New Labour’s second term marked a lull in educational policy making, there was still a shift in emphasis towards greater choice, competition and diversity which later continued into its third term (Shaw, 2007). In particular, comprehensives were to be definitively ‘modernised’, with Estelle Morris, Education Secretary 2001-2002, stating that they failed to ‘cherish’ difference, and Blair blaming them for the creep of a ‘deadening

uniformity' (cited in Ball, 2008: 95). Proposals to extend specialist status to 50% of schools, create more Academies and Beacon Schools, and expand the intakes of successful schools (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2001) were also to find expression in the 2002 Education Act. This was followed by a paper (DfES, 2003) announcing plans for nearly two-thirds of schools to hold specialist status by 2006. By the same year, the EiC initiative and Beacon Schools were also to have been dissolved and absorbed by a new 'Leading Edge Schools' programme which reinforced the message that schools could improve against the odds by incentivising innovative and improving schools to share advice and good practice with others (Evans *et al*, 2005). Plans to take the 'modernisation' of comprehensive schools a step further appeared in the government's 'Five Year Strategy for Children & Learners' (DfES, 2004), proposing a new system of 'independent specialist' or 'trust schools'. The idea was that governing bodies of improving schools could vote to become Foundation Schools and thereby free themselves from the remaining influence of LEAs by taking control of land, management, staffing and admissions. Whilst diversity was seen as key in meeting different needs and aspirations, in conjunction with increased independence and autonomy, it was also seen to encourage greater sensitivity towards different 'abilities'. Indeed, besides again reaffirming the value of setting by ability, a further White Paper (DfES, 2005: 20) stated in tripartite-like terminology that schools needed to ensure that 'every pupil – gifted and talented, struggling or just average – reaches the limits of their capability'. The broad outline of this thrust became law via the 2006 Education & Inspections Act which essentially hinged around limiting LEA's to strategic roles as promoters of choice and standards, and as moderators of parental complaints and concerns rather than democratically elected and accountable local providers.

With the retirement and replacement of Blair with Gordon Brown in mid-2007 there were signs of a change in emphasis and the possibility that greater measures of social justice might come to the fore. Shortly before, Brown (BBC, 2007) had restated his view that education was key to both economic success and individual life chances, and that it would continue to be his 'priority': 'it will have pride of place, and indeed it's my passion'. Millar (in Whitty, 2008: 178) points out that shortly afterwards, as head of Brown's new Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Ed Balls' first parliamentary address failed to mention the words "'diversity' and 'choice', the mantra of the Thatcher, Major and Blair years'. Moreover, after a fiasco over late and incorrectly marked SAT's tests, this was followed by a scrapping of the tests for 14 year olds. Beckett (2008) expressed cautious optimism that this might be the first of many steps towards a less intensive testing regime, less selection, less competition and less educational involvement by business and faith groups. In 2008, the 'National Challenge'



(DCSF, 2008a, 2008b) was launched with the purpose of ensuring all English secondary schools achieved 5 A\*-C GCSE pass rates of 30% by 2011. However, the Challenge essentially continued with a zero tolerance stance towards failure, requiring schools to produce plans for improvement, with those unlikely to meet the target subject to direct interventions such as the replacement of management, staff and governors, closure, merging with or coming under the leadership of a more successful school. For Riddell (2009: 74), the Challenge amounted to another managerialist and performance orientated policy in which schools remained 'responsible for their own improvement', with failure to reach targets attributable to 'weakness or complacency' and a general lack of positive vision, drive, and determination. He also warned that besides the potential temptation for those schools hovering around the new 30% threshold to respond by diverting time and resources to D-grade pupils to convert them to the C's or above measured in league tables, for those schools further off target – of which the majority had large numbers receiving FSM's – such quick fixes were unlikely to pay off.

Nonetheless, 'The Challenge' signalled a more systemic approach to underachievement, which was given further impetus in the 2009 DCSF report, *'Breaking the Link'*. Exploring the link between disadvantage and low attainment, the report suggested that in light of a general increase in standards and the large gains made in deprived areas, there was now an imperative 'to break the link for all pupils, whether they are in a school or an area with concentrated deprivation, or as most of them are, in more average schools spread out across the country' (DCSF, 2009: 20). At the same time, it suggested that with the exception of Traveller children, working class pupils and white working class boys in particular constituted the lowest attaining group. Whilst Ed Balls stated the need to tackle what he called 'the devil in our education system' (cited in, Shepherd, 2009), there appeared to be little engagement with the fact that between them, both New Labour and their Conservative predecessors had created an education system which had greatly aggravated class-based inequalities.

### ***The Wider Education Policy Regime.***

Indeed, by the late 1980's competition and choice had begun to emerge as a major topic of research (Boulton & Coldron, 1989; Hunter, 1991). Yet Bowe *et al* (1994: 63) argued that the majority of such work had been 'captured by the discourse' of choice and marketisation, limiting itself to explorations of the extent to which both were 'driven' by exam results', and/or those factors to which schools might appeal in their efforts to win greater parental custom. For Bowe *et al*, to work within the limits of such a discourse was to de-contextualise choice-making and overlook the fact that:

‘the market masks its social bias... [and] elides, but reproduces, the inequalities which consumers bring to the marketplace. Under the guise of neutrality, the institution of the market actually confirms and reinforces the pre-existing social order of wealth and privilege’ (Ranson, 1988: 15).

Yet by the early 1990’s several Scottish studies had begun to explore the relationship between choice-making and social class (Echols *et al*, 1990; Willms *et al*, 1992). Echols’ *et al*’s (1990: 216) postal survey, administered in 1987 to a random national sample of parents of the first pupil-cohort to begin secondary schooling after 1981<sup>13</sup>, revealed choice to be ‘a positive function of... high social class... and of high parental education’. They also drew attention to the fact that limited or non-existent opportunity for choice-making in rural areas effectively rendered the ‘alert’, urban middle classes the major beneficiaries of choice legislation (Willms *et al*, 1992). Indeed, alongside the ideological drive behind the shift towards educational marketisation, Brown (1990, 1995) suggested that a powerful challenge to comprehensivisation had come from the middle classes, upon whom an increasing amount of research began to focus. For Brown (1995: 34) the past 20 years of socio-economic change had altered the relationship between education, certification, and labour markets, with middle class bureaucratic career structures having been destabilised as both public and private sector employers sought more ‘flexible’, ‘flatter’ and ‘leaner’ employment structures. Coupled with the radical contraction of the youth labour market, organisations had increasingly ‘bureaucratized and rationalized recruitment practices’ and placed a renewed emphasis upon the holding of appropriate educational qualifications and certification alongside pressures for applicants to develop their ‘charismatic’ qualities for a broader ‘value-added’ curriculum Vitae’ (Brown, 1990: 401; 1995: 43). Brown (1995: 33) suggested that such changes had heightened middle class parents’ awareness of the ‘uncertainties of success and the consequences of failure’ in a way which rendered the education of their children as ‘too important to be left to chance’ (Brown, 1990: 401). Drawing upon Weberian notions of exclusionary social closure whereby groups seek to improve or safeguard their positions ‘by restricting access to rewards and privileges to a limited circle’ (Parkin, 2002: 101), Brown (1995) suggested that the ERA had coincided with this new middle class educational ‘instrumentalism’, and provided a mechanism through which they could seek out and maximise their children’s opportunities in a way which limited those of others.

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<sup>13</sup> The Education Act 1980 was introduced in Scotland in 1981 Act (Scotland).

Yet whilst Brown (1995: 29) suggested his observations ‘must await detailed empirical investigation’, the seminal choice studies of the Centre for Educational Studies<sup>14</sup> (CES) had already begun in-depth examinations of middle class use of the education market (Ball *et al*, 1995, 1996; Gewirtz, 1995; Reay & Ball, 1997; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Reay, 1998b, 1998c). Whilst seeking to build upon the Scottish parental choice research, they sought to move beyond its descriptive and general examination towards more explanatory and theoretically informed analyses of the overlap between ‘rhetoric’s of choice’ and ‘the choice making process in real social contexts’ (Bowe *et al*, 1994: 64). Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, their analyses examined the interplay between choice, class, habitus and cultural capital (Ball *et al*, 1995), exploring the various ways in which educational choice-making provided a ‘new social device’ by which inequalities within and through education were (re)produced (Reay & Ball, 1998: 89). Moreover, in seeking out contextual understandings of the relationship between choice-making and patterns of inequality, the studies examined the education market as localised phenomena animated by the lived, ‘‘mundane’ processes of school choice’, and generated interview data with 137 parents in the throws of such processes across 3 neighbouring London LEA’s of differing social class and ethnic mix (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995: 7). They described middle class parents as ‘privileged/skilled choosers’ who besides valuing educational choice were able to:

“‘decode’ school systems and organisation; to discriminate between schools in terms of policies and practices; to engage with and question (and if necessary challenge) teachers and school managers; to critically evaluate teachers’ responses; and to collect, scan and interpret various sources of information... while... also maintain[ing] a degree of ‘healthy’ scepticism about the value and meaning of impressions and information’ (Ball *et al*, 1996: 93).

Reay (1998b: 199) explored the ways in which mothers took primary responsibility for such work, describing the sense of ‘educational urgency’ often compelling middle class mothers to engage their children in intensive regimes of extra-curricular study and activity in order to generate ‘value-added’ CV’s. Whilst equally concerned about their children’s education, ‘a combination of diminished resources and less social power’ meant that working class mothers were less able to generate the same kind of returns and engage with the choice-making process (*ibid*, 199). In this respect, working class parents were characterised as ‘disconnected choosers’ whose choice-making tended to be much more a question of ‘pragmatic accommodation’ relating to various costs in terms of transport, travel time (and safety while

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<sup>14</sup> Kings College, London.

travelling), family disruption, and the happiness and wishes of children themselves (Ball *et al*, 1995: 57). While these were contingent rather than determining factors for 'privileged/skilled choosers', the fact that 'disconnected choosers' concerns for their children's education were 'embedded in a complex pattern of family demands and structural limitations' (*ibid*) also combined with a tendency for them to display 'little confidence in their ability to understand or interpret the language of teachers' and to be 'more confident with the material realities of plant and facilities' (Ball *et al*, 1996: 106). Moreover, whilst schools' academic performance played an important role in the choice-making of all parents, this formed part of a wider set of important class related 'cultural indicators' (Ball *et al*, 1995: 70-71). These aspects of choice involved informal 'grapevine' or 'hot' knowledge and rumour which cut past the 'cold' knowledge produced by schools or local and central government and connected with direct observation and 'feel' as a way of unlocking the 'under-life of a school' (Ball & Vincent, 1998: 377, 381). Indeed, for middle class parents the personal and affectual dimensions of choice were often the deciding factor in making final choices or eliminating alternatives which hinged around the 'iconography of traditional, selective schools' and the various 'class-related messages/signs to be read off from the school setting... demeanour of the students and the attitudes of the staff' which often went on to make comprehensives and the idea of mixed-ability grouping 'reasons for avoidance' (Ball *et al*, 1995: 72; Ball *et al*, 1996: 97). For working class parents the personal and affectual dimensions of choice lined the processes by which the limits of their choice-making were often confirmed. Indeed, drawing on the same data, Reay & Ball (1997: 89, 97) explored the ways in which their choices were infused with 'powerful memories and images of personal failure' underpinning a 'rational avoidance of high risk choices' and the possibility of setting their children up to fail in 'individualised, publicly humiliating ways'. Whilst the authors argued that working class people have never 'been at home' in the English education system, their data pointed towards 'processes of self-elimination' and a 'repeated self-depreciation' which filled their choice-making with a need and desire for their children to 'feel at home' and 'fit-in' at school, thereby invariably pointing towards local comprehensives in which any relative failures might be 'more masked, shared processes' (*ibid*, 93, 97). All of these subtle yet powerful and differentiated dimensions of choice-making were seen to feed into what Gewirtz *et al* (1995, 52) described as 'circuits of schooling' in which 'local circuits' comprised those schools largely considered by working class parents, and 'cosmopolitan circuits' those considered by their middle class counterparts. In this respect, they suggested that the wider importance of the 'new social device' of educational choice was that the net actions of middle class choice-making may well have

contributed to a process of ‘decomprehensivisation’ as schools became increasingly segregated along the lines of class and ‘race’ (*ibid*).

Yet while this work indicated that such trends were identifiable within highly localised education markets, more extensive, quantitative analysis revealed a set of more conflictual insights. Using pupil eligibility for FSM as a proxy for poverty, Gorard & Fitz (1998) reported their findings from a study of segregation in South Wales as indicating that between 1991 and 1996, *after* the ERA, there was a decrease in social segregation amongst secondary schools. However, a later study using national data from England and Wales (Noden, 2000) found an increase in the social segregation of pupils eligible for FSM amongst the secondary schools of 72% of LEA’s between 1994 and 1999. These findings appeared to tally with similar evidence from New Zealand (Lauder *et al*, 1999) and were also confirmed by Gorard himself examining figures for the same period (Gorard & Fitz, 2000). Covering the same 4 year period between 1995 and 1999 and arguing that low-income families whose children attend ‘good’ schools can often be ‘rich’ in other forms of capital, Gibson & Asthana (2000) suggested that as final examination outcomes such as the GCSE are closely related to class they provide a much better measure of segregation along such lines than FSM, and subsequently produced further findings which highlighted greater social segregation. For Gorard (2006) the key issue was that the early desegregation evidence provides a significant challenge to arguments that education markets are intrinsically divisive, and that other factors must thereby be driving current trends towards greater segregation. However, as the in-depth qualitative studies of parental choice and all the quantitative examinations of the later period have revealed, whatever its primary driver(s), choice legislation can lend itself to greater amounts of segregation. Thus as Noden (2001: 202, emphasis added) points out, for those concerned with educational segregation, arguments against the ‘segregation pressures *nurtured* by the quasi-market’ remain valid.

However, alongside tendencies for educational choice-making to produce increased levels of social segregation between schools, others examined the ways this combined with additional aspects of education policy to produce segregation and other effects within schools as head teachers, Senior Management Teams (SMT) and teachers have responded to pressures to better their league table positions and attract more (educationally valuable) pupils and funding (Thomas & Bullock, 1997). Gewirtz (1997) examined the impact of greater school autonomy in relation to the ERA’s other component parts, using interview data from teachers across four London secondary schools to explore the emotional, social and pedagogic impact of reform

upon their work. Noting that teaching has always tended to be an ‘intense’ profession, Gewirtz (*ibid*, 224) described a situation in which the nature, rhythm and content of the intensity had shifted, demanding greater amounts of time and emotion within a ‘climate of surveillance’. Whilst assessments, targets, and the monitoring of both combined with regular, externally prescribed syllabus alterations to create huge levels of additional paperwork, teachers also indicated that more time and energy were being absorbed by ‘difficult’ pupils, compounded equally within overcrowded, over-subscribed schools, and those undersubscribed schools lacking the resources to deal with them. Yet in spite of this, OfSTED inspections and league tables left them feeling under great pressure to somehow ‘perform and conform’ (*ibid*, 224). Indeed, huge pressures to produce yearly improvements in GCSE examination results<sup>15</sup> saw hierarchical lines of accountability established which allowed the league-table, ‘performance-driven market’ to infiltrate classroom practice and contributed to great emotional strain (*ibid*, 225). Moreover, whilst noting that low-attaining pupils have historically been conflated with notions of ‘low-ability’ and ‘poor quality’, Gewirtz (*ibid*) suggested that the presence of such views amongst her teacher sample seemed to be bolstered by the market regime, which encouraged the ‘differential valuing of students according to their levels of academic attainment’. In pedagogic terms, all this contributed to the general perception of the decreased ‘vitality and creativity’ of teaching which was narrowly focused upon exams and targets in a ‘climate which is extremely hostile to progressivism’ (*ibid*, 229). In a similar way, Mahoney *et al*’s (2003) study of performance-related pay revealed that despite the potential to achieve higher salaries, teachers found the idea of financial incentives at odds with their professional values and saw the individualised nature of the process as counter to successful schooling as a collective endeavour and achievement. Moreover, whilst teachers themselves suggested that it had not influenced practice, Mahoney *et al* (*ibid*: 1) nonetheless found that they became more focused upon targets and data for tracking pupil performance, and that this sat alongside parallel concerns that both targets and data had a ‘negative impact on teacher creativity and on how students were valued’. At a general level, the authors thereby concluded that the policy ‘fitted into the existing context of pressure, surveillance and regulation’ of the teaching profession (*ibid*, 137).

This kind of pressure also provided the backdrop for Reay’s (1998c) examination of the ways that alongside the ‘external’ pressures parental choice-making generated in relation to social segregation and funding, as educational consumers, parents could also have a direct internal impact within schools in a way which intersected powerfully with greater school autonomy to

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<sup>15</sup> Of which the number of A\*-C grades constitute ‘passes’ in published ‘league-tables’.

effect pedagogic practice. Researching a London secondary school, Reay found that drives to improve the school's position in GCSE league tables and the connected chase for pupils and funding coincided with pressures from a number of middle class parents to abandon mixed-ability teaching groups. Indeed, whilst the 'tiering' of SAT's and GCSE exams exerted further pressures for setting, it was also seen by the head teacher and SMT as 'an attractive educational product' for middle class parents whose high-attaining children represented 'valuable commodities' (*ibid*, 552). In this respect, Reay suggested that pragmatic responses to market forces were placing powerful limits on professional judgement and sound pedagogic practice. Yet in contrast to the continuing impact of middle class parents upon their children's education, Gillies' (2005b: 285) work indicated that for working class parents the ongoing home-school relationship could be quite different. Indeed, while the importance of education was recognised by working class families, aspirations were 'often contextualised by their children's experience of failure and vulnerability from an early age'. She found that with limited possession of the 'correct' cultural capital to intervene in their children's education with the same confidence and ease as middle-class parents, working class parents became defensive during their contact with schools, sometimes gradually disengaging and detaching themselves from their children's schooling so as to separate the home and school environments and thereby create a space in which their children's 'worth was still recognised' (*ibid*).

Gillborn & Youdell (2000: 12) examined the impact of the pressures generated by educational marketisation ethnographically, exploring the ways in which education markets had created 'a situation where almost every aspect of school life is re-evaluated for its contribution to the headline statistic of the proportion of pupils attaining five higher-grade GCSE passes'. They suggested that like many other schools, this had forced the secondary school they studied to group and stream pupils according to 'aptitude and ability', and to operate what they described as a system of 'educational triage' whereby extra resources were re-directed towards those groups and streams in which pupils' GCSE grades might be boosted into the A\*-to-C range and thus 'show the maximum return from their receipt' (Gillborn, 2001: 108). In this respect, the introduction of education markets which appeared to be encouraging the 'processing' of pupils 'according to their commercial worth' (Gewirtz, 2000: 362), had significantly altered the nature of the teaching profession by 'introducing ideologies and managerialist practices more in line with business than education' (Winter, 2000: 161), and had forced schools and teachers into 'operating in responsive mode' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000: 42), all too aware that like their pupils they too are being monitored and assessed through league table publications,

and that compliance with the quasi-marketised education system is in the best interests of the school's long-term survival.

Yet running throughout all this was what Gillborn & Youdell (2000: 212, emphasis removed) described as a 'new IQism' in which 'hereditarian assumptions (and all the concomitant inequalities of opportunity that they produce and legitimate) are coded and enacted through the discourse of 'ability''. Indeed, they found that teachers linked ability and class and 'race', with middle class pupils in particular seen to possess superior levels of ability. Whilst pointing out that the fact that tests of ability could be prepared for 'should rationally destroy any belief that they measure innate potential', like older and discredited notions of intelligence, ability was seen to be 'fixed, generalised and measureable potential' (*ibid*: 65). Faith in the validity of measures and their power to predict future outcomes informed the ways in which pupils were 'processed'. Gillborn & Youdell (2000) found that working-class and ethnic minority pupils were over-represented within lower 'ability' streams seen as too far behind to yield a worthwhile return from 'educational triage'. Against the emphasis placed on the A\*-C grade range, lower sets were often perceived to be 'second class contexts' which disempowered and demotivated those within them.

However, the belief that setting by ability raised standards was re-examined and challenged by Boaler (1997) who began by pointing out that 'little, if any, research anywhere in the world' supported the idea that the practice raised levels of attainment (*ibid*: 576). During a three-year longitudinal ethnography, she examined the progress of pupils in one setted and one mixed-ability school. In the former she found an overrepresentation of working class pupils in lower sets in which de-motivation, disillusion and underachievement stemmed from the pace and limits of the class. Moreover, she also found no evidence of raised achievement and suggested that success essentially hinged around the capacity of pupils to thrive and work confidently and quickly in competitive and pressurised conditions. This in turn appeared to account for the overrepresentation of middle class students in top sets, and in contrast, after 3 years in the more 'relaxed and open approach' of the mixed-ability school, she found that:

'students who did well were those of high ability. Students who did exceptionally well, compared to their entry scores, were mainly working class students... [and] those who did exceptionally bad were both working class and middle class students' (*ibid*: 592).



Taking a closer look at the perspectives of secondary school teachers in relation to these matters, Dunne & Gazeley (2008: 452) found that whilst rarely acknowledged and sometimes openly denied, class was often implicitly mapped onto their understandings of achievement in which ‘middle class pupils were encouraged to achieve while the underachievement of many working class pupils was normalised’. At the same time as lower data and test predictions caused little cause for concern, attitude, motivation, behaviour, lack of concentration and listening skills were cited as compounding causes of underachievement rather than responses to it. Moreover, such ‘deficiencies were rarely linked by teachers to issues of curriculum access or to their own pedagogy’ (*ibid*: 456). Yet they also ‘abdicate[d] agency in the construction of educational and social hierarchies’ by explaining the underachievement of working class pupils in relation to their home life which lay beyond the scope of schooling (*ibid*: 460). In contrast, there was a much greater acceptance that middle class underachievement could be tackled within schools.

Whilst such empirical studies were surprisingly few, there was a complete absence of such work in relation teacher education, which remained a sociological ‘backwater’ (Furlong, 2005). Courses were seen to have become increasingly focused upon producing a teacher workforce which was purely functional and a means through which various policy ends could be achieved (Mahony & Hextall, 1997). Indeed, Winter suggested that in this sense, ‘the teacher’ was being reconstructed as a ‘practical person, a ‘doer’ not a ‘thinker, and a ‘manager’ rather than a ‘scholar’’ (2000: 155). Moreover, whilst the regime of course inspection and accreditation had ‘increased direct control of the curriculum and assessment process’ and thereby forced course providers to develop courses which were much more practically orientated (Furlong, 2001: 27), what was seen to be especially problematic was the fact that issues of social justice were marginalised within the achievement criteria for trainee teachers (Barton *et al*, 1994; Mahoney & Hextall, 1997; Ball, 1999; Crozier 1999; Reay, 2004; Hill, 2001, 2007; Younger, 2007). More recently, Hill (2007: 214) suggested that this had essentially led to a situation in which teachers were now:

‘by and large, trained in skills rather than educated to examine the ‘whys and why nots’ and the social and political contexts of the curriculum, of pedagogy, of educational purposes, of the structures of schooling and education, and the effects these have on reproducing and widening racialised, gendered, social class based inequalities in a capitalist national economy’.

### ***Summary.***

This chapter has continued the examination of the study's key themes of class, education policy and structure, the teaching profession, and academic understandings of the reproduction of class-based inequalities within and through education in relation to New Labour. At the same time, whilst exploring the ways in which social exclusion and inclusion became key concepts within the party's political philosophy, it has also highlighted the ways in which the terms harbour the potential to obscure complex social divisions and lines of inequality. Moreover, it has pointed to New Labour's tendency to use the terms in ways which located the key barriers to inclusion within 'the excluded', with a parallel danger to pathologise and blame them in the process. Yet it has also examined the ways in which education came to occupy a pivotal position between the global economy and social justice as inclusion. Indeed, with social exclusion understood primarily in relation to a lack of paid employment, the development of the nation's human capital via education was seen as crucial for the creation of both a strong and vibrant economy and a more inclusive society. However, at the same time, we have seen how New Labour continued to reform the education system in line with the direction established by its Conservative predecessors. Indeed, a concern for 'standards' remained central and persisted alongside the view that schools and teachers rather than structures constituted the major barriers to their improvement. Yet the improvement of 'standards' also continued to be seen as being linked to a need to generate greater choice and diversity, and in this respect, a key development was a shift within the 'triangle of tension' whereby LEA's were reduced to administrative and advisory roles in an effort to give schools greater autonomy, and for new educational partners such as private business to be actively encouraged to engage with provision. This was central to the creation of a greater diversity of schools and the definitive fragmentation of the comprehensive system. Moreover, whilst there was significant educational investment in disadvantaged localities, both the area-based nature of such initiatives and the over-riding dominance of the market logic limited their impact.

However, despite New Labour's emphasis upon education as the key route to a more inclusive society, sociological explorations of the impact of educational marketisation revealed the ways in which it has created a 'new social device' for the perpetuation of 'old inequalities in new ways' (Reay, 2004: 337). Indeed, middle class parents appear to be much more able to exercise and augment their choice-making in ways which increase the likelihood that their children will attend well-resourced, high-performing schools. In this respect, the classed nature of educational choice-making appears to have nurtured segregation between schools. In turn, this appears to also have been coupled with a greater degree of segregation within schools as

institutions have turned to practices such as setting and educational triage in an effort to attract more educationally attractive pupils and maximise their league table positions. The logic of a system of survival by results has also thereby had a major impact upon the teaching profession, with the push and pull of the market system appearing to encourage their compliance with its imperatives even where they may not accept and support them. Taken as a whole, the market system has compounded class-based educational inequalities by creating a zero-sum game in which the choices and actions of some groups impact upon the opportunities and experiences of others. From this perspective, social exclusion within and through education needs to be understood in the strong/hierarchical sense in which exclusion is the product of long and cross cutting lines and layers of inequality, division and the processes and relationships beyond 'the excluded'themselves.

# 4

## **Class, Social Exclusion & Education: Explorations of Theory & Research.**

### ***Introduction.***

Within preceding chapters we have traced the ebb and flow of long running educational struggles heavily imbued with issues of class and the beginnings of their effacement in the final decades of the twentieth century. In turn, we have sketched the ways in which weak/horizontal versions of social exclusion which obscure complex lines of division and inequality and locate exclusion within ‘the excluded’ themselves have since come to dominate discussions of opportunity, disadvantage, welfare and public service provision. In this chapter we switch gears and consider class and social exclusion from an academic perspective. Divided into three sections, the first begins with an examination of the ways in which conceptualisations of class as a narrow, economic, and occupationally rooted category causally related to distinctive forms of consciousness, action and culture have underpinned its marginalisation across academic agendas. This is followed by an exploration of new directions in class analysis which look beyond the material facts of class and pay close attention to the ways in which their associated inequalities continue to feed into the cultural and symbolic realms. Section two shifts the spotlight onto the conceptual and empirical contours of social exclusion. It maps out the tendency for class to be reduced to a descriptive and economic variable relating to a redistributive sphere of justice and seldom considered in relation to the cultural and symbolic aspects of social exclusion more readily associated with other nodes of division and inequality bound to the politics of (mis)recognition. This is followed by an exploration of the ways in which new directions in class analysis might be used to inform an analysis of social exclusion and classed-based educational inequalities before section three concludes with a review of research which takes a closer look at class, social exclusion and education, flagging up key ways in which this study moves things on.

### **Section 1: The Changing Landscape of Class Analysis.**

#### ***The Crisis of Traditional Class Analysis.***

As Crompton (1998: 16) points out, ‘changes in the structure of work and employment, as well as in the kinds of persons engaged in it, have supplied much of the empirical basis for arguments concerning the declining significance of class’. Whilst post-industrialisation has

radically decreased the ranks of the manually employed ‘traditional’ working class – with a corresponding expansion of non-manual ‘white’ and ‘pink collar’ employment – the significance of work as a foundation for social attitudes and identities has also declined as consumption and lifestyle have established themselves as key sites of individual and group formations (Roberts, 2001). Such changes have challenged the causal model of traditional class analysis in which consciousness, action and cultural forms were seen to depend upon people’s explicit acknowledgement of their own economic and occupational class position relative to others.

This kind of base/superstructure approach was adopted by Dennis *et al* (1956) in their anthropological explorations of the relationship between work, leisure, family and community life in an English coal-mining town. They found that the work and conditions of men fed into and structured a tight solidarity at the other levels of analysis, and that this collective way of life and thinking underpinned a class consciousness and powerful understanding both of themselves (us) in relation to the management (them) and strong support for working class politics. Working from a similar starting point, Lockwood (1958) complicated Marxian notions of class, consciousness and culture via a Weberian analysis of clerks as ambivalently positioned somewhere between the middle and working class. He sought to explore their ‘sense of identification with, or alienation from, the working class’ and any accompanying implications for solidarity and political union between the two (*ibid*: 13). Despite sharing the same relationship to the means of production, Lockwood found that clerks were differentiated by income, job security, mobility prospects, the structure and quality of their working relationships and the status attached to their positions. Moreover, he found diversity in the class consciousness of clerks with a tendency towards either ‘extreme working-class or extreme middle-class’ positions (*ibid*: 211). Lockwood’s (*ibid*: 210) suggestion that those enjoying greater affluence and upward mobility might be adopting the values and attitudes of the latter in which ‘individualism... replace[d] the collectivist ethos of working class consciousness’ fed into arguments that the prosperity of the 1950’s and 60’s was eroding the traditional working class and its politics via a process of embourgeoisement (Devine & Savage, 2005). This provided a point of departure for Goldthorpe *et al*’s (1969) examination of claims that the working class were adopting middle class norms, lifestyles and political orientations. Based in Luton – a site of rising affluence – they drew upon survey data generated in a car plant in order to explore the work, patterns of sociability, aspirations and perspectives of its workers. Counter to the embourgeoisement thesis, Goldthorpe *et al* found that heightened prosperity stemmed from long hours in alienating conditions and that whilst

atomised, their norms and lifestyles remained working class. However, whilst largely working class in form, their politics were seen as advantageous in ‘defending and furthering personal economic interest’ in a way which pointed towards ‘a new working class conservatism’ and away from their role as a collective and revolutionary force (*ibid*: 170, 171).

Devine and Savage (2005) point out that such findings sat at odds with ‘outbreaks of worker insurgency, especially in France and Italy in 1968, but also in the same Luton car plant’. They also point to studies by Moore (1975) which revealed the intersection of class consciousness with religion, and Mann (1973) who used secondary attitudinal data from the US and UK to reveal four aspects of class consciousness (class identity, opposition, totality and utopianism) which were only very rarely held at once. They note that by the 1980’s ‘the prevailing view was that there was no tidy relationship between class structure and position and cultural beliefs and practices’ (Devine & Savage, 2005: 7). With class traditionally understood in terms of these relationships, during the same period there were suggestions that the concept was thereby fast approaching redundancy (Gortz, 1982; Pahl, 1989). In this respect, energies were turned towards a greater emphasis upon stratification and the operationalisation of ‘systems of class categories’ for understanding ‘who belongs where’ and conducting ‘various kinds of correlational, comparative or mobility research’ (Ball, 2003: 5). Moreover, as culture was jettisoned from class analysis, the broader thrust of the cultural turn saw other nodes of difference and inequality come to the fore in the form of identity politics (Sayer, 2005; Dworkin, 2007). Indeed, besides the fact that class analysis had tended to marginalise women by ignoring or subordinating the importance of domestic labour, new patterns of employment, and their wider roles in class formation (Crompton, 1998), its domination also left little room for the other markers of difference and division such as ‘race’, disability, age and sexuality which cut across the class structure. In many respects the politics of class was seen to be rooted in the brute realities of another era with new agendas and concerns relating to difference and its recognition arising from its limitations (Savage, 2000). As ‘de-industrialisation’ and moves towards a ‘post-Fordist’ regime of production continued to disorganise the working classes (Crompton, 1998), it subsequently limited ‘the ability of powerful trade unions to keep the figure of the heroic working class male on the British political agenda’ (Skeggs, 2004: 57). This was accompanied by a wholesale retreat from class within popular culture (Munt, 2000), and as Gillies (2005: 836) points out, ‘the ascendancy of theories describing a new age of ‘reflexive modernity’ in which individuals produce their own biographies... [also proved] highly instrumental in leveraging class off the academic agenda’.

***Beck, Giddens & Bourdieu.***

Beck (1992: 87, 128), for instance, argues that modernity has intensified to the point at which it has now begun to 'overtake its own coordinate system', and that we have moved towards a new and reflexive phase of modernity in which 'historically prescribed social forms and commitments' such as class, 'jobs for life', marriage, family, and traditional gender roles have become increasingly irrelevant points of reference for individuals via gradual processes of individualisation and atomisation - processes he sees as lying at the heart of the institutions and provisions of the welfare state. For example, modern state education systems are seen to impart 'reflexive knowledge of the conditions and prospects of modernity' by displacing local and specific knowledge with universal forms that are in turn measured and credentialised on an individual basis (*ibid*: 93). This informs a self-reflexive awareness and desire for mobility and forms of employment and consumption that further weaken networks of community and kin and deepen individualisation further still. For Beck, as the rigidities and determinism of class have withered, people have increasingly been left to 'produce, stage, and cobble together their biographies themselves' (Beck 1997: 95). Yet at the same time, whilst modernity's prior phase hinged around wealth production and distribution, risks were essentially rooted within particular class locations. In contrast, modernisation (particularly in relation to techno-science) has created universal risks such as environmental disaster and socio-economic insecurity, which no longer correspond to class structure. Class societies are seen to have been replaced by 'communities of danger' in which risks do not discriminate and unite rather than divide (Beck, 1992: 47).

A similar theory of late modernity has been advanced by Giddens (1991) whose work has been a powerful influence on the politics of New Labour (Skeggs, 2004). At its core lies the idea of 'ontological security' as an instinctual human requirement for predictability and stability in everyday social life. In this respect, our attraction and desire for routine provides a counterbalance to potentially unsettling questions regarding the fragility of human bonds and existence. In relation to questions of self-identity, security has traditionally been sought in the reflexivity which surrounds the routines which generate reliability and consistency of the self and formulate a particular and relatively predictable biography. Yet in a similar way to Beck (1992), Giddens (1991: 14) suggests that social change has involved a process of 'detraditionalisation' in which the old markers and socio-cultural paraphernalia through which ontological security was achieved have waned, with people increasingly required to (re)construct it via a myriad of new and shifting reference points and 'possible ways of life'. In this sense the self has become an increasingly unstable and reflexive endeavour, with the

choices and routines which follow forming relatively stable yet permanently contingent lifestyles. Whilst Giddens sees capitalism as being lined with a class structure through which circumstances and opportunity will vary, in relation to the self and its constitutive behaviours, actions and decisions, such constraints are overridden by the universal reflexive project of the self he sees as running autonomously to any social structural roots.

Yet whilst acknowledging these challenges and the problems associated with older approaches to class, a new generation of class theorists have sought to transform:

‘the scope and analytical framework of class analysis: inflating ‘class’ to include social and cultural formations, reconfiguring the [older] causal model...abandoning the notion of distinct class identities or groups... [and] focusing instead on individualised hierarchical differentiation.’ (Bottero, 2004: 985).

They accept what Savage (2000: xii) has described as the ‘paradox of class’ in which its structural pertinence generally fails to feed into ‘a self-conscious principle of social identity’. However, this runs parallel to an acceptance that ‘we cannot walk away from class as a category because it continues, in spite of current arguments to the converse, to tell us something very important about women’s and men’s lives’ (Reay, 1998: 260). Indeed, despite the vagueness associated with the concept, class is seen to link, ‘however imperfectly, social structure with social action... and can be used as an organising concept for the investigation of a wide range of issues associated with social inequality and social differentiation’ (Crompton, 1998: 208). Within all this the work of Bourdieu has emerged as the central intellectual resource (Devine & Savage, 2005: 13), which for Savage:

‘allows us to see class relationships as fundamental to claims of legitimacy and entitlement... and his arguments lead not to an emphasis on class as heroic collective agency, but towards class as implicit, as encoded in people’s sense of self worth and in their attitudes and awareness of others – in how they carry themselves as individuals’ (2000: 107).

Unlike Beck and Giddens, Bourdieu continues to see action and reflexivity as firmly rooted within class and develops a theory of practice which moves beyond an emphasis on the economic realm to explore the ways in which inequalities of class are simultaneously (re)produced and circulate through the cultural and symbolic realms (Weininger, 2005). Animating his work is the conceptual triad of habitus, field, and capital, with the first being the most elemental of his analysis. For Bourdieu the habitus is a ‘socialised subjectivity’ which



absorbs and matches the characteristics of the socio-cultural environment in which it evolves and provides a sense of and feel for the world in which an individual moves and operates. In this respect, it is an embodiment of certain orientations, tastes, modes of thinking, acting, judging, perceiving and appreciating the world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 126, 21). Yet habitus also tries to capture ‘intentionality without intension’, reaching for the kind of second-nature or taken-for-granted reflexivity which saturates social action - the ‘prereflective, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion in it’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 19). In turn, by way of their immersion within particular socio-cultural contexts individuals come to embody a habitus with ‘the marks of social position and social distance’ - a habitus which is the product of a positioning within the social structure/hierarchy of society (Skeggs, 2004: 46). In this way Bourdieu (1993: 46) suggests that ‘there are classes of experiences and therefore classes of habitus - the habitus of classes’. Far from a descriptive variable relating to the material facts of class or an empty and redundant category with little relevance for the ways in which people live their lives, class is seen to underpin differences in taste, judgment, perception and modes of thinking, feeling and being in the world (Reay, 2004).

Yet as Savage (2000: 95) puts it, ‘class does not stand like a puppet-master above the stage, pulling the strings of dolls from on high: rather it works through the medium of individualized processes’. Indeed, whilst appearing to be a kind of inherited determinism which operates from within, Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 133, original emphasis) suggests that the ‘habitus is not the fate that people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions*... It is durable but not eternal!’ The habitus is the product of biographical experience, dependant upon the socio-cultural contexts to which a person has experienced sustained exposure, meaning that ‘just as no two individual histories are identical, so no two individual habitus are identical’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 46). The habitus is cumulative and creative, sediments without ever solidifying, and thereby remains permeable and responsive to its surroundings. New experiences and circumstances are not simply filtered through the habitus giving rise to courses of action, they are also internalised and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socialisations’ (Reay, 2004: 435) – ‘and so on, from restructuring to restructuring’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 134). Yet Bourdieu (*ibid*: 133) also stresses the ‘relative irreversibility’ of the process by which the habitus is formed. Indeed, given that ‘all external stimuli and conditioning experiences are, at every moment, perceived through categories already constructed by prior experiences, it follows that there is ‘an inevitable

priority of originary experiences and consequently a *relative* closure of the systems of dispositions that constitute habitus' (*ibid*, original emphasis).

Yet vital here is his assertion that 'the correspondence between social and mental structures fulfils crucial political functions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 13). Indeed, rather than the vacuous and murky concept of society, individuals are seen to move and operate within 'fields' or 'relatively autonomous spheres of 'play' that cannot be collapsed under an overall societal logic' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 17). As arenas of action, fields are 'social microcosms' in which particular values, processes and regulative principles 'inform and set limits on practice' (Adkins, 2004: 193). Given that the habitus is essentially an interpretive, evaluative and perceptual schema which corresponds to the particular locations in which it was generated, for Bourdieu it follows that the schema of those who dominate particular fields may become 'instruments of domination' as they become transposed onto them and become the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 13). Furthermore, rather than 'historically contingent fallouts of a given balance of power between classes, 'ethnic' groups, or genders' (*ibid*: 14), the evaluative, classificatory schemas which run throughout fields take on an appearance of objective necessity - they appear as natural and innate. It is in relation to these arbitrarily structured fields that the relative potency and energy of the habitus is unlocked, with the extent of its power dependent upon the 'neatness' of the tessellation between it and the field in which it operates. Given that different habitus are positioned differently within the social microcosm of a field, a strong homology between the two is likely to translate into a good 'feel for the game' and an ability to operate like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 127). Conversely, a 'mismatch' between habitus and field may result in difficulty as the individual will find s/he is operating in a novel environment. In this respect the habitus can function as a kind of 'capital' depending upon the degree of homology it shares with a field.

Indeed, broadening the notion of capital beyond its economic conceptualisation to include culture as a particular type of capital (Moore, 2004), Bourdieu suggests that the form and operation of the social world could not be reduced to what he called 'mercantile' (economic) exchange (Bourdieu, 1986). In relation to education for example, he suggests that analysing filial investment in education in mere monetary terms:

'neglects to relate scholastic investment strategies and the system of reproduction strategies...[to] the best hidden and socially most determinate educational investment, namely the domestic transmission of cultural capital...[Arguing that] the scholastic yield from

educational action depends upon the cultural capital previously invested by the family ' (*ibid*: 107)

Moreover, Bourdieu suggests the educational 'field' is essentially middle class and that 'the habitus of different families and classes are more or less closely aligned with those of the school' (Moore, 2004: 451). Thus the characteristics of a habitus which correlates strongly to that of the school are transmitted into a kind of capital - a 'cultural capital' - making the possessor of that habitus more likely to be able to operate with ease within the school environment, and in all probability, to succeed. For Bourdieu (1986: 106) 'the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world', thus its unequal distribution amongst individuals and social groups 'determines the manner and extent of their involvement in education' (Moore, 2004: 452). The subsequent legitimisation of the system via the acceptance of the logic of its outcomes amounts to what Bourdieu describes as 'symbolic violence' – the process by which relations of power and order are produced and maintained by the imposition of arbitrary cultural systems rather than coercive physical force. Intended as ideas and metaphors to be used like 'tool kits' to inform, guide and explore empirical work (Bourdieu, 1990: 107), Bourdieu's framework offers ways in which to begin thinking about how people come to read and value themselves and others in particular contexts; the ways in which class can permeate their movements within them; and how more powerful actors can shape the structures and processes of particular contexts. In the UK, such work has provided the foundations for a powerful re-working of class analysis which looks beyond the material facts of class and pays close attention to the ways in which their associated inequalities continue feed into the cultural and symbolic realms.

### ***New Directions in Class Analysis.***

Whilst as potent as their predecessors, new directions in class analysis have been much 'more subtle and nuanced' (Reay, 2006: 289), opting for a 'wider and deeper' (Reay, 1998: 265) conceptualisation of class which is 'premised on the interrelationship between the 'economic' and the 'social'' (Crompton, 1998: 119), and 'leave[s] behind the romantic baggage which portrays class cultures as collective' in a way that makes it 'possible to talk about class cultures as forms of individualised awareness' (Savage *et al*, 2001: 888). Rather than decline and disappearance, class is seen to be increasingly hidden, obscure, and less discernable. Instead of being determined by a set of overt signifiers such as labour market position, networks of solidarity and a narrowly defined political class-consciousness, class is seen to be

infused within a matrix of covert processes and actions. As Bottero suggests (2004, p. 93, emphasis added), the significance of this is that many researchers are no longer ‘looking for class-consciousness, but rather *classed* consciousness, in which the recognition of social divisions – or rather social distance – is embedded in practice’. Savage (2003: 536-537) describes this as entailing ‘a kind of forensic detective work, which involves tracing the print of class in areas where it is faintly written’. Whilst he suggests contemporary class identities are to be found in practices and accounts of practices (Savage, 2000), Reay (2005: 912) widens this to include the circularity between the ‘thinking and feeling that generates class practices’. There has thereby been a shift away from social survey work towards interview and ethnography as tools for generating ‘thick descriptions’ attuned to explorations of the nuances and subtleties of class as understood at the level of everyday experience and for this to be placed within everyday contexts rather than held up to ‘abstract expectations of what class awareness should be, or even might be, like’ (Devine & Savage, 2005: 12). There has also been a corresponding acceptance that ‘the complexities and ambivalences of class awareness should be analysed in their own terms, rather than as a difficulty to be explained away’ (*ibid*: 12-13). This has underpinned a rich and broad agenda of research which has sought to track the salience of class through explorations of the variegated ways it continues to inform the cultural and symbolic realms of society.

Indeed, Charlesworth’s (2000: 5) phenomenological analysis of the contemporary cultural conditions of working class life and experience in a northern English city takes the corrosive impact of neo-liberal socio-economic reconfiguration upon industrial solidarities of ‘family, work and place’ as its point of departure. He examines how this landscape intersects with long-running forms of domination and symbolic violence, which circumscribe his respondents’ sense of self and being-in-the-world. Working amidst the political and discursive effacement of class, he found the accounts of younger generations, unlike older peers, displayed an absence of ‘any narrative of the social... [or] the co-ordinates of class’ and revealed an ‘arid individualism devoid of personal embedding in something beyond the ego’ (*ibid*: 2). Yet during his explorations of the conditions stemming from their position in the world, through and within their accounts Charlesworth tracks the ways in which ‘their experience of class is embedded in a world that demands to be dealt with’ – a world in which working class people are absorbed and come to articulate the reality of coping with its demands, stigmas, ‘injunctions, frustrations and dangers.... that sap the will’ (*ibid*: 279). For Charlesworth then, they are:

‘involved in a world that too many know nothing other than; hence what is linguistically constituted takes form within the parameters of what they expect; it follows the delineated contours of the plausible, and is held within the world as it has been imbued – a world that emerges from structures of power never seen, only felt’ (*ibid*).

Working with the same effacement of class, Skeggs’ (1997: 2) ethnography of 83 northern English working class women explored the ways in which ‘the category ‘woman’ is always produced through processes which include class’, and that ‘classifying produces very real effects which are lived on a daily basis’. For her, the contemporary legacy of negative historical constructions of working class women as dangerous, pathological and unworthy of respect, ‘social value or legitimacy’, continues to hinge around the respectability, value and legitimacy embodied by middle class others (*ibid*: 3). Acutely aware of the representations attached to various positions within social space, this recognition fed into the ongoing construction of their own subjectivities. Indeed, noting that there has always been little cultural capital to be made in being working class and female, Skeggs found that these women resisted working class categorisations and constructions through creative attempts to ‘cloak themselves in respectability’ (*ibid*: 160). Yet for Skeggs (*ibid*: 95), their dissimulations from class were produced by and through class in ways which were lived as a ‘structure of feeling’:

‘Their subjectivities come to be produced through processes of disidentification and dissimulation, showing how the dialogic judgemental other is central to their productions and how class operates at an intimate and emotional level’ (*ibid*: 13).

Yet there was also a powerful circularity at work given that the flowing of these inequalities through the symbolic and cultural realms were at once rooted in and bound to the maintenance of material inequality. In pursuing respectability, respondents were engaged in bodily, consumptive and familial investments as part of an ongoing effort to re-position and re-present themselves in relation to the negative and unwanted signifiers of working class women. Yet at the same time, unable to convert aspects of the habitus into mobility-producing capitals, such investment was largely ‘a process of continually halting losses rather than trading-up and accruing extra value’ (*ibid*: 161). For instance, as either a paid or unpaid form of employment, caring for others afforded them an opportunity ‘to ‘make something of themselves’... [and] to be recognised as respectable, responsible and mature’ (*ibid*: 56). However, such investments ‘often closed down other ways of being; so when they made investments in caring this closed off their possibilities for focusing on themselves rather than others’ (*ibid*: 161).

Amidst the fall out of socio-economic changes and accompanying effacements of class within politics, academia and the media, such work explores the salience of class as an implicit and unspoken facet of experience, highlighting the ways in which it colours people's sense of self and sense of the conditions which they encounter and engage with. Yet it also draws attention to the ways in which this can mingle with wider processes of representation, stereotyping and stigmatisation which tie in to the living and making of class (Skeggs, 2004). Examining the convergence of class, gender and sexuality within discursive repertoires and representations for instance, Johnson (2008: 67) has explored how the homoeroticisation of young working class men in the gay porn and clubbing industries depends upon pathological representations which both stem from and sustain 'the social construction of symbolic class distinctions'. He points to a long history of 'disgusted fascination' with working class sexuality as both potential pollutant and captivating 'other' to middle class civility. In this respect, despite its allure, he suggests that the hard hyper-masculine heterosexuality of working class young men remains soaked through with the threat of homophobic violence. Tracking the commodification and consumption of this dangerous sexuality by gay men via an array of masquerading products and services, Johnson suggests that this provides safe and playful access and exploration to 'a culture marked as risky and threatening' (*ibid*: 75). Yet for Johnson, those in possession of symbolic power are able to 'wield, shape and constitute what is 'given' through particular representations of reality' (*ibid*: 77). In this respect, those with the power to appropriate and use the cultural capital of others in turn have the power to attribute them with certain levels of value. Thus in symbolically fixing and assigning aspects of a particular habitus to a worthless and devalued position in social space, a 'symbolic reality' is constituted and imposed 'in which some people and some groups can be legitimately regarded as less valuable than others' which simultaneously bolsters faith in middle class 'superiority and legitimacy' (*ibid*: 78).

Such work begins to suggest that the ways in which working class people are constituted within representations and discourses produced by more powerful groups can have important implications for the ways in which they are treated (Skeggs, 2004). Whilst true of interpersonal relations, this also applies more widely, and can be seen in the ways in which the pathological and deficit understandings of certain working class people embedded within the idea of the 'underclass' has had a clear set of policy implications (MUD) (Levitas, 2005). Yet such work also hints at the ways in which representations and discourses are continually modified and remade as they circulate through different temporal and social spaces. Hayward & Yar (2006) have traced the replacement of the 'underclass' discourse in the UK with the idea of the 'Chav'

(Council housed and violent). As Levitas (2004: 19) points out, whilst the idea of an 'underclass' was largely used in relation to 'poorly qualified working class young people', it was also heavily gendered:

'The delinquency of young men is directly criminal and antisocial, accompanied by wilful idleness and drug abuse. Young women's delinquency manifests itself in their sexual and reproductive behaviour, the imputed irresponsibility of lone parenthood.'

Intergenerationally transmitted and thereby connected and underpinned by the degenerate nature of their socialisation, which deemphasised work and family ethic, this discourse also fed into notions of a 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Hayward & Yar (2006: 18) suggest that in building on top of this, the popular discursive reconfiguration of the 'underclass' as 'Chavs' marks a shift in emphasis away from the idea of flawed producers/workers towards the idea of 'flawed consumers'. Tracking the emergence and tone of the term as used across a range of popular media, they point to the ways in which 'Chavs' are seen to be marked by an 'excessive participation in forms of market-orientated consumption which are deemed aesthetically impoverished' (*ibid*: 14). Whilst also recapturing notions of a *nouveau riche* in the form of 'celebrity Chavs' whose economic wealth is seen to fuel a vulgar and excessive form of consumption, it is largely used to refer to disadvantaged urban young people in ways which leaves their consumption of branded designer goods, gold jewellery, baseball caps and hooded tops decoupled from their economic capital. In this respect, whilst the devalued cultural capital generated by their flawed consumption stands as a marker of flawed and deficient selves, cultural choices are attributed with:

'what can in fact be seen as the outcome of a cruel capitalist perversity: the production, on the one hand, of a social strata excluded from full productive participation in the neoliberal economy, and on the other the ruthless dissemination of messages that link social worth and well being to ones ability to consume at all costs' (Hayward & Yar, 2006: 24-25).

McCulloch *et al* (2006) and Nayak (2006) have explored some of the ways in which these representations and discourses have fed into the ways young people read and understand one another and themselves. Drawing upon interview work with 82 young people in Newcastle and Edinburgh, in contrast to assertions that the consumption and subcultural groupings of young people are products of 'free-floating lifestyle choices', McCulloch *et al* (2006: 539) examined the ways in which they are 'largely determined by social class'. Whilst Goths and Skaters

tended to come from middle class families and neighbourhoods and be fully engaged in either education or employment, 'Chavs' came from working class families and council estates and were mostly unemployed. Moreover, they found, 'Chav' was unique in functioning as an 'othering' label, and only rarely as a self-identifying label' (ibid: 547). Indeed, unlike 'Chavs', besides being able to identify their own class positions, Goths and Skaters drew distinction from others through style, dress, leisure, music and attitudes in an effort to carve out a sense of uniqueness by distancing themselves from what they saw as a 'normal' and 'herd' mentality. Whilst also seeing 'Chavs' as from 'poor backgrounds' with parents who 'were unemployed or had problems', McCulloch *et al* (ibid: 552) found that 'Chavs' saw other groups as 'stuck up', 'posh' and as thinking they were 'better'.

Alongside McCulloch *et al*'s (2006) exploration of *inter*-class differences in relation to consumption and subcultural groupings, Nayak (2006) has examined similar issues in relation to *intra*-class differences amongst the working class. Drawing upon ethnographic work with young working class men from Tyneside, he explored the ways in which the unspoken category of class continues to circulate through the symbolic and cultural economies in ways which are 'discursively mapped onto the post-industrial city and the working and non-working bodies that lie within'. Nayak found that those who saw themselves as 'Real Geordies' – heralded from the 'aristocracy of labour' – drew a sense of pride from the working class masculinity of their industrial past in their negotiations of the present. More specifically, the 'anatomy of labour' was 'discursively signalled, embodied and iterated in new styles of consumption' (ibid: 826). Indeed, whilst 'Real Geordies' built solidarity around a shared sense of place, humorous (sexual and violent) events/anecdotes, drinking and clubbing, their engagement in service sector employment also allowed them to consume in ways which maintained 'respectability' by drawing distance from 'rough', 'undeserving' 'Chavs' and their families. Designer shirts, haircuts and the consumption of exclusive city venues were seen to mark 'Real Geordies' as 'clean, thrifty, skilled and upwardly mobile' and 'exert a sense of cultural prestige' over 'Chavs' whose demeanour, dress, speech and activities marked them as 'parasitic, animalistic and 'beyond the pale'' (ibid: 825). In contrast, Nayak (ibid: 820) found that as 'young men from long-term unemployed families', 'Chavs' were 'priced out' of the post-industrial city. Aware of their economic marginalisation and the derision and stigma attached to their bodies and circumstances, they reconfigured their familial/occupational histories by adapting to 'social class inequalities by enacting an unapologetic posture of survival that was 'ruff', tough and street-wise' (ibid: 826). In this respect, Nayak (ibid: 827-



828) concluded that whilst seldom discussed, social class remained salient as an ‘affective politics’ which was ‘felt in practice, tacitly understood and deeply internalised’.

Taken together, this broad programme of research highlights some of the ways in which class continues to feed into identities, lifestyles, and the ways in which ‘we think and are thought by class’ (Ball, 2003: 6). In turn, it illuminates the relational and processural nature of class as something which is constantly made and remade, and the various ways in which historical reconstitutions and atavisms can key into individual subjectivities and ‘perspectives on the social world and relationships in it’ (*ibid*).

In contrast to theorists of individualisation and reflexive modernity then, new directions in class analysis have argued that the processes and conditions they describe are lived by individuals who continue to be culturally and symbolically situated. However, besides contributing to the academic effacement of class, the repercussions of theories of reflexive modernity have been even more powerful given their influence upon the politics of New Labour in relation to social exclusion (Skeggs, 2004). As we have seen, rooted within a weak/horizontal version of exclusion, individuals are de-contextualised and dis-embedded from the brute realities of their socio-economic locations, and a process of ‘causal transference’ occurs in which the social and economic problems placing limits on the possibility of reflexive modernisation are obscured and misinterpreted first and foremost to be problems of ‘irresponsible parenting, poor teachers, truancy, lone mothers, estates from hell, and so on’ (Bromley, 2000: 51). In this way integrationist ‘workfare’ understandings of exclusion (SID) become intertwined with those which blame and pathologise (MUD), and, in turn, theories of reflexive modernity can be seen to have informed a ‘classless politics’ of social exclusion’ and seriously undermined the ‘rhetorical space’ for academic engagement with class as a conceptual tool that may enrich understandings of exclusion (Skeggs, 2004). We now turn our attention to the ways in which social exclusion has been understood within research, and after exploring the ways in which it has tended to reduce class to a narrow and descriptive variable, we consider how new directions in class analysis can provide a lens through which social exclusion and classed-based educational inequalities might be analysed together.

## **Section 2: The Conceptual & Empirical Contours of Social Exclusion.**

Despite its Weberian roots, in the context of the UK, contemporary academic understandings of social exclusion were in many ways anticipated by Townsend's (1979) work around poverty. Indeed, rather than poverty marking the threshold of subsistence, he suggested that it should be expanded to include concerns regarding the level of resources necessary for full and active membership of society. For Townsend (*ibid*: 32) the resources of groups, families and individuals could be 'so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities'. In this respect he was able to broaden discussions of poverty 'from income to resources, and from consumption to participation' (Levitas, 2005: 9). This went on to underpin large-scale social surveys such as 'Breadline Britain,' which explored levels of 'socially perceived' needs and requirements for participation in society (Mack & Lansley, 1985: 45). Yet as the Europeanisation of social policy proceeded, the language of social exclusion gained ground with researchers who sought to slip past Conservative refusals to acknowledge the existence of poverty and the accompanying language of the 'underclass' which blamed and pathologised those who experienced it (Welshman, 2006). Indeed, in reviewing the growth of poverty and inequality under Conservative rule, Walker & Walker (1997: 8) followed Townsend's understanding of poverty before suggesting that social exclusion should be seen as:

'the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society'.

Whilst not always perfectly overlapping, this nonetheless countered deficit understandings of poverty by refocusing attention on the ways in which it was inextricably linked to the impact of wider societal processes and the actions of others. Two years after social exclusion had been identified as a 'thematic priority' by the ESRC, and in the same year as New Labour took office, a new Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) was established at the LSE which subsequently came to provide much of the 'intellectual input' for the Social Exclusion Unit (Welshman, 2006). As Byrne (2005: 1) points out, the language of exclusion was soon to be found 'everywhere in contemporary UK social policy, not only in the processes of policy development but also at the sharp end of policy implementation'. Whilst New Labour's emphasis upon evidence-based policy ensured that social exclusion became a central concern of increasing amounts of research (*ibid*), academic discourses of exclusion differed greatly from its own weak/horizontal version.

### ***Social Exclusion as an Academic Discourse.***

Within academic discourse understandings of social exclusion and inclusion have largely been rooted within stronger/hierarchical versions which emphasise the role of poverty and inequality and share varying degrees of sympathy with RED (redistributive discourse). Whilst poverty is largely focused upon distributional issues - the lack of material resources at an individual or household's disposal (Cousins, 1999) – and the idea of disadvantage attempts to capture the 'interaction between material resources and the provision of social services and supports' (Percy-Smith, 2000: 4) - social exclusion is a more comprehensive and multilayered concept which also covers neighbourhoods and communities at local, national, and global levels (Burchardt *et al*, 2002). Yet it is also seen to be multidimensional in its operation within and across societal sub-fields or arenas such as health, housing, employment, education and broader social, cultural and political activities (Hills, 2004). At the same time, exclusion and inclusion are also seen to be relational in that they 'necessarily involve a relationship with the wider or sub-sections of the society from which individuals or groups are excluded' (Lister, 2004: 88). This aspect of exclusion throws the spotlight onto the nature of both the micro/interpersonal and macro/socio-economic relationships animating institutions in ways which give society its particular texture and form (Gewirtz, 2001).

Yet through and alongside this relationality, there is also seen to be a dynamic relationship between the layers and dimensions of exclusion which draws attention to the idea of movement and 'things happening' and being 'done to people' over time (Skeggs, 2004; Byrne, 1999). It is in this respect that social exclusion and inclusion are also taken to be verbs which focus attention upon process (Fairclough, 2000; Hills, 2004). However, Burchardt *et al* (2002: 4) point out that at the centre of all this lies the question of just 'who [or what] is doing the excluding?' with responses essentially linked to corresponding views of agency. Yet this is not simply a question of 'how far people are able to act independently and how far their behaviour is constrained and shaped by social structures', but also one of 'motivation, why people wish to do what they do, and capacity, the personal qualities and the material and cultural resources they can draw upon' (Deacon, 2004: 447). In this respect, Barry (2002: 14) has suggested that 'apparently voluntary' exclusion should be viewed with scepticism given that such acts will almost inevitably be linked to the quality of the choices on offer' and/or constitute a response to 'experience[s] of hostility and discrimination'. Similarly, Lister (2004) points out that far from aiming to either pathologise or position 'the excluded' as passive victims, this engagement with agency is aimed at understanding not just how 'the excluded' operate within

the circumstances which confront them, but how the actions of more powerful groups may be implicated in the generation of such conditions.

Whilst government's understanding of social exclusion has tended to highlight the responsibilities and behavioural aspects of individuals, families and entire neighbourhoods and communities (MUD and SID), research has tended to favour causal explanations which link exclusionary processes to structure, highlighting the role of global, national and local contexts, how they relate to social divisions, welfare provision, poverty and disadvantage (Percy-Smith, 2000; Burchardt *et al*, 2002), and the political, economic and social role of institutions along with the 'agency of the more powerful' (Lister, 2004: 96). In this respect, Percy-Smith (2000: 3) suggests the term is often more or less used to consider:

'disadvantage in relation to certain norms of social, economic or political activity pertaining to individuals, households, special areas or population groups; the social, economic and institutional processes through which disadvantage comes about; and the outcomes or consequences for individuals, groups or communities'

Yet while the relationship between poverty and social exclusion can be sequential and causal – with either one leading to the other – or descriptive – with one seen as an extreme manifestation of the other in which it is rooted – in both instances neither maps directly on to the other (Lister, 2004). In this respect, the idea that there are points of overlap rather than complete convergence paints a picture in which 'some people experience material poverty and social exclusion simultaneously while others can be in poverty without being socially excluded or can be socially excluded without being poor' (*ibid*: 83). Indeed, this kind of complex and variegated picture of exclusion has been revealed by empirical work. A key study from CASE (Burchardt *et al* 1999: 241) used BHPS data to track levels of social exclusion between 1991 to 1998 and concluded that:

'given the complexity of the associations between different dimensions of exclusion, and the relatively high proportions of those excluded on one dimension who are not excluded on others, no clear-cut multidimensional category of socially excluded people can be identified using these indicators. The results suggest that the dimensions of exclusion are best treated separately rather than amalgamated into a single category of the 'socially excluded''

Whilst Burchardt *et al* measured exclusion in relation to broadly defined areas of consumption, production, political engagement and social interaction, the more comprehensive work of the

Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (Gordon *et al*, 2000; Pantazis *et al*, 2006) drew upon both primary and secondary data to examine exclusion in relation to income, paid employment and exclusion from both services and social relations. Yet similarly, they found a large amount of fluidity in the nature and duration of exclusion and that very few people were excluded across all four measures at any one time. In light of such research, Lister (2004: 98) has suggested that:

‘while it is possible to identify processes of exclusion [in specific fields/arenas and subfields/arenas of the social world] and even states of specific forms or dimensions of exclusion [such as economic, political, cultural, or educational], we currently lack empirical evidence of a clearly distinguishable, more generalised phenomenon of social exclusion. Instead, other than its most acute form (which appears to be rare), social exclusion is better understood as a potentially illuminating concept and as a set of political discourses with a range of policy implications’

Levitas (2005: 50) has also suggested that social exclusion/inclusion should be understood as analytical concepts rather than empirical phenomena, and that against their political deployments there is a particular need to reclaim a discourse ‘in which poverty (and social exclusion) were seen as inextricably linked with structural inequality, polarization and class’. Similarly, for Byrne (2005: 4, emphasis added), explorations of social exclusion ‘must be able to *bring together concepts* and provide an account of complex interacting levels in society’. It is the relational aspect of stronger/hierarchical versions of social exclusion/inclusion which provides a framework for doing just this (Lister, 2004). As Williams (1998: 15) puts it, this ‘relationality’:

‘allows us to look at issues to do with social and cultural injustices generated by inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and disability and the ways these may intersect and be compounded by issues of distribution’.

Yet for Lister (2004), such injustices are much less frequently examined within social exclusion research. Taking culture to be a ‘maker of difference’, she understands cultural exclusion to be a ‘fundamental process by which people’s identities are devalued by the norms and symbols of mainstream society’ and they are seen as unable to live up to ‘cultural expectations’ (*ibid*: 93). In turn, this is closely related to the ‘symbolic dimension’ of exclusion, which refers to the ways ‘the excluded’ are defined both by themselves and the rest of society (*ibid*: 90). Exploring these relationally rooted cultural and symbolic aspects of

exclusion in relation to poverty, Lister has drawn upon the work of Nancy Fraser in order to explore the latter as a 'wheel' in which the politics of redistribution form its material hub and a politics of recognition form its relational/symbolic rim. Concerned with the practical and intellectual disassociation of both forms of justice, Fraser (2004: 229) argues that they constitute a false antithesis given that both forms require each other in ways which 'cut across all social movements'. Indeed, she begins with two ideal-type positions at the extreme ends of a spectrum along which cases, simultaneously drawing upon both forms of justice, are distributed. At the redistributive end sits a class politics concerned with the abolition of differences generated via the political economy by affecting changes in society's economic and political structures. At the other sits a milieu of identity politics which orbit divisions of sexuality, disability, gender and 'race' in an effort to deconstruct the discursive hierarchies which sustain the misrecognition and devaluation of difference. Yet for Fraser, nodes of injustice are in fact two-dimensional and scattered along this continuum in a way which demands both forms of justice. For example, women are neither squarely a class nor a status group given that they are at once embedded in exploitative and oppressive forms of un/paid labour and a wider androcentric culture in which they are demeaned and devalued. Lister's (2004: 178) concern is that poverty should also be seen as a bivalent category, suggesting that whilst 'more powerful actors' structure the material conditions of those experiencing poverty, 'they also have the power to construct 'the poor' as Other through words, images and deeds'. This aspect of relationality in turn has implications for the ways in which people are treated both institutionally and interpersonally and 'points to the importance of political struggles at the relational/symbolic rim' of the poverty wheel (*ibid*: 100). Othering is a key mechanism of cultural and symbolic exclusion which not only 'makes it easier for people to blame the Other for their own and societies problems', but also maintains an emphasis on the processural nature of exclusion which in this instance involves 'social construction, differentiation and demarcation' (*ibid*: 102, 179).

In this respect, whilst research has pointed away from a concrete category of the 'socially excluded' and suggested that the idea of exclusion best captures the marginalisation of people within particular fields and sub-fields of society, academic conceptualisations drawing upon a strong/hierarchical version of exclusion provide ways in which the processes of exclusion can be understood in relation to the divisional hubs of identity politics and their associated inequalities. In particular, considering the cultural and symbolic aspects of social exclusion provides a way of unpicking some of the ways in which exclusion operates at the level of people's everyday and ongoing encounters with institutions and other social actors/groups. Yet

whilst the relationality of strong/hierarchical versions of exclusion broadens the scope of analysis in such a way, the concept of class has been ambivalently placed within academic discussions and explorations of social exclusion. Indeed, Mooney (2008: 68) points out that it often tends to be ‘minimised as an explanatory concept’ - ‘reduced to a descriptive variable, as only one among other equally significant variables’. However, for Murad (cited in MacDonald & Marsh, 2005: 207), ‘exclusion is the name given to the process of splitting up and restructuring the working classes’ in which some are subsequently ‘condemned to continued precariousness’. Byrne (1999: 128) has similarly described exclusion as not:

‘the property of individuals or even social spaces... [but instead] a necessary and inherent characteristic of an unequal post-industrial capitalism founded around a flexible labour market and with a systematic constraining of the organisational powers of workers as collective actors’ (*ibid*, 128).

Perhaps owing much to the way in which class has traditionally been understood as a narrow, economic, and occupationally rooted category causally related to distinctive forms of consciousness, action and culture, it has seldom been considered alongside the other nodes of inequality Williams cites in relation to the ‘social and cultural injustices’ bound up with exclusion. If within the majority of social exclusion policy class has remained ‘the theme that dare not speak its name’ (Bromley, 2000: 51), at the level of research it has tended to be treated as a narrow economic classification. Yet as Fraser (2004: 234) points out:

‘class, too, is probably best understood as two-dimensional... To be sure, the ultimate cause of class injustice is the economic structure of capitalist society. But the resulting harm includes misrecognition as well as misdistribution. And cultural harms that originated as products of economic structure may since have developed a life of their own. Left unattended, moreover, class recognition may impede the capacity to mobilise against misdistribution. Thus, a politics of class recognition may be needed to get a politics of redistribution off the ground’.

Whilst academic understandings and explorations of social exclusion have developed and remained closely bound to poverty, given that the two overlap rather than map directly on to one another, beyond the fact that poverty remains deeply interconnected to social class (Mooney, 2000, 2008; Lister, 2004) there is also a need to consider the relationship between class and social exclusion in a much broader sense. Indeed, moving beyond an emphasis upon poverty and moving explorations of exclusion into the realm of the ‘included’ majority

facilitates a more fundamental problematisation of society and the nature of its constitutive institutions and relations. In this respect, the concept harbours the potential to raise radical questions about what the 'inclusive society' – the 'circle of acceptable conditions' (Byrne, 2005: 57) – might look like and the very nature of the society which policy aims to integrate people into (Bowring, 2000). Moreover, moving beyond the distributional and material issues of poverty and class towards the idea that such issues can underpin 'cultural harms' which have 'developed a life of their own' involves a re-recognition of the ways in which class continues to inform the cultural and symbolic realms of the social world. Given that new directions in class analysis have taken this recognition as their point of analytical departure, it provides an important framework to key into and inform understandings of social exclusion.

### ***Class and Social Exclusion: Towards a Synthesis.***

The relationality of strong/hierarchical versions of exclusion provides a way of recapturing the idea that social exclusion takes places in hierarchically ordered societies cross-cut by inequalities and divisions of class, 'race', gender, disability, sexuality and age. Yet the bulk of social exclusion research has tended to treat class as a narrow economic concept relating to a redistributive sphere of justice. In this respect, class has featured little in explorations of the cultural and symbolic aspects of social exclusion more readily associated with other nodes of division and inequality bound to the politics of (mis)recognition. However, new directions in class analysis have drawn attention to the ways in which the inequalities of class continue to circulate through and within such realms. At the same time, both empirical evidence and academic discussions suggest that social exclusion is best used as a concept for examining the ways that the dynamic processes by which people are marginalised are continually played out within and across the various layers and dimensions of society. In this respect, it is a concept particularly well attuned to contemporary explorations of class. Indeed, new directions in class analysis have sought to move away from the idea of class as 'static' and descriptive in search of movement and process. Rather than focusing on 'where you are situated', it is about exploring the 'processes that got you there' (Reay, 1998: 260). At the same time, it involves reading 'class as *dynamic*; a system of inequality which is constantly being re-made in the large- and small-scale processes of social life' (Lawler, 2005: 797, original emphasis), and as relationally worked out within interactions and institutions within and across society's constitutive domains (Reay, 1998: 265). Similarly, strong/hierarchical versions of exclusion draw attention to the ways in which exclusion is rooted within the structure of society, within the political, economic and social roles of institutions, and within the actions of other, more powerful groups. In this respect, social exclusion can be read as part of the process by which



class is made and remade as people are interpersonally and institutionally marginalised. The discussion now moves on to consider the ways in which educational exclusion has been understood within both policy and research, drawing in particular upon those studies which have explored social exclusion through the lens of class.

### **Section 3: Education, Class & Social Exclusion.**

#### ***Forms of Educational Exclusion.***

In relation to education, for New Labour the problem of social exclusion has been twofold. The first concerns the broad links between educational achievement and its future inclusionary/exclusionary impact, while the second relates to formal school exclusions, self-exclusion in the form of truancy, and educational disaffection or disengagement within school (Byrne, 2005). However, in both instances exclusion tends narrowly to be seen to reside within the excluded themselves rather than the education system and wider society in which they live and operate (Robertson & Hill, 2001; Youdell, 2006). In this respect, New Labour's understanding of educational exclusion is consistent with their generally weak/horizontal view of exclusion. As Gillborn & Youdell (2000: 30) point out, whilst the language of education is frequently warm and inviting, it is often laced with subtle yet powerful discursive undercurrents premised on the notion that rather than agents caught between the rock and the hard place of 'multiple economic, social and historic structures of inequality... [and] a particular nexus of oppressive relations', working class people are 'somehow adrift from normal (white middle-class) aspirations and attitudes' and act as brakes on their own achievements. Yet as Byrne (2005: 139) points out, 'actual exclusion from school... can best be understood as simply the extreme end of a continuum in which many adolescents and young adults join the ranks of the non-included'. Parallel to this, Ridge (2000, 2002) and Robertson & Hill (2001: 74) have pointed to the importance of the 'subtle, 'invisible' ways in which some children and groups are excluded' within schools. These observations go some way in repositioning the spotlight on the ways that the structures, relations and rhythms of schooling may be implicated in the generation of exclusion. At the same time, steering into a much stronger/hierarchical version of exclusion allows people to be re-situated within cross-cutting lines of inequality and division which feed into institutions such as education and its relations at various levels. In this respect, educational exclusion can be read as a much more ubiquitous process which keys into the various ways in which class is played out within and through education. Yet studies using the lens of class to explore social exclusion within schools have

been few, with those few leaving key elements unexplored. We now turn our attention to this work.

### ***Introducing Class.***

Working critically with the concepts of social exclusion and the ‘underclass’, MacDonald & Marsh (2005: 1) conducted 141 interviews with 88 young people from Teesside in order to ‘understand, from the point of view of those at the sharp end, how processes of social exclusion intermesh with processes of youth transition’. Based within an area of social exclusion ‘*in extremis*’ – ‘a place apparently most conducive to underclass formation’ (*ibid*: 198) – they acknowledge that the dynamic and processural nature of social exclusion demands methodologies attuned to explorations of changing situations and experiences. They took a biographical approach which sought to generate holistic explorations of the complex interplay of school, family, housing, school-to-work, criminal, leisure and drug-using careers which had ‘led young people to their current situations’ (*ibid*: 20). The examination and comparison of individual accounts offered ways to grasp the ‘shared social conditions and objective constraints against which these stories are made and how these were perceived and responded to in similar and different ways’ (*ibid*: 43). Exploring the ‘role of schooling in the shaping of ‘inclusionary’ and ‘exclusionary’ transitions’ (*ibid*: 48), they found accounts to be overwhelmingly negative. Young people conveyed a general dislike of teachers and a ‘‘pointless’, ‘meaningless’ and ‘menial’’ curriculum, as well as a sense that in ‘low-achieving schools’ and ‘low-achieving class[es]’ there was a general perception of ‘not being an educational priority’ (*ibid*: 50). Moreover, in a similar way to older ethnographic studies of alienated pupil subcultures, informal pupil relations appeared to have structured young people’s schooling experiences. Indeed, for some of a large minority who had suffered bullying, their harassment accounted wholly for their affectual and physical disengagement from school. For the rest, and often intersecting with the occupation of low status educational spaces and positions, there appeared to have been an ongoing and shifting tension between their negotiations of an ‘instrumental approach’ to school and ‘strong informal sanctions in the opposite direction’ (*ibid*: 54). In this respect, ‘‘inclusion’ in the formal life of the school could mean effective ‘exclusion’ from informal friendships groups’ (*ibid*: 55). All this underpinned widespread instances of truancy, with around half being frequent truants whose accounts were marked by descriptions of ‘dull’, ‘uninspiring’ school days. Accounts were also marked by negative and suspicious assessments of the relationship between educational success and employment prospects relating to the specific constellation of opportunities perceived to await them.

Considering their experiences retrospectively, two of the most common findings were that informal relations were the most valued aspects of young people's schooling, and that most wished they had worked harder. Indeed, despite the fact that accounts were told with 'a weary, sometimes jocular and occasionally questioning acceptance that this was their lot' and that their experiences had been overwhelmingly negative (*ibid*: 63), in the final instance they appeared to conclude that 'they had been wrong and the teacher right' and to suggest that 'failure' be 'interpreted as an outcome of an individual's own choices and actions' (*ibid*: 65). Intersecting with other careers, schooling fed into variegated trajectories and ways of getting by in socially excluded conditions which pointed away from the idea of an homogenised 'underclass'. Whilst united by 'class, ethnicity and place' and rooted in conditions which were 'shared and constant', their subjective experiences and transitions were different and contingent, were 'buffeted by unanticipated critical moments', and did not 'roll on deterministically to foregone conclusions' (*ibid*: 196). In turn, rather than being the products of 'cultural choices of a generation disconnected from the normal mainstream', the mores, values and aspirations underpinning transitions were 'stubbornly normal' (*ibid*: 199). Young people held 'hyper-conventional' family and housing aspirations and attitudes to work, with welfare and 'fiddly work' seen as ways of surviving rather than ways of life, and unemployed parents fuelling a 'sharper determination to avoid the same for themselves' (*ibid*).

Placing their findings within wider 'sociological debates about place and class' (*ibid*: 205), MacDonald & Marsh note the impossibility of solving global problems – the globalisation of finance and investment – individually and/or via locally based areal initiatives. In this respect, they suggest for many working class young people, transitions represent 'a struggle against exclusionary probabilities' (*ibid*: 209). They take issue with accounts of 'reflexive modernisation [which] underplay the social structuring of psychic and emotional resources on which reflexivity depends and overplay the ability of personal life-planning to overcome the class based, material basis of social exclusion' (*ibid*: 211). For them, reflexivity is not an 'individual resource' freely and equally available to all. Rather, as Bourdieu suggests, 'agents are endowed with habits, internalised from past experiences' which generate 'adapted and continuously renewed strategies, but within the limits of structural constraints by which they are produced and which define them' (*ibid*: 210). This, they suggest, is reflected in the variegated trajectories and attempts to 'get by under shared, persistent conditions of poverty and economic marginalisation' (*ibid*).

MacDonald & Marsh work with a strong/hierarchical version of exclusion through which they not only engage with the language of class, but also seek to interrogate thinking which points to the deficits and pathologies of people in accounting for their situations. They deploy a methodology well-suited to the exploration of social exclusion as a dynamic process and the accompanying ways in which it is experienced in ongoing and various ways at the level of everyday life embedded within particular contexts and conditions. However, their emphasis upon youth transitions and the multiple careers of which they are comprised means that the role of education in the generation of inclusionary and exclusionary transitions is considered in a broad sweep. This subsequently affords little in the way of in-depth insights into class and social exclusions crosscutting relationships to schooling and the underpinning of its structures, relations and rhythms by a particular education policy regime.

In contrast, Youdell (2006: 1) has used an ensemble of theoretical tools in a close exploration of within school exclusion, exploring 'school processes [which] act unwittingly to excluded particular students from the educational endeavour'. She works with a strong/hierarchical version of exclusion which runs counter to ideas that social exclusion can be tackled by 'an education system that is not itself called radically into question' (*ibid*: 12). Working through what she describes as a 'discursive performativity' framework (*ibid*: 33), Youdell suggests that educational inequalities essentially revolve around identity categories that merge and mingle with each other to form 'a 'constellation' that comes to 'be' the apparently whole person' (*ibid*: 29). These constellations key into the constitution of students to 'open up or close down the possibilities available for the sort of student and learner a subject of schooling can be' (*ibid*: 96). Foucauldian notions of discourse are crucial for Youdell in providing the means by which people (subjects) are made intelligible and meaningful in the world. In this way, as 'bodies of knowledge that are taken as 'truth' and through which we see the world', it is the various discourses circling identity categories and particular constellations that are seen to set limits on the possibilities of subjectivity (*ibid*: 35). For instance, heterosexual, white, working class men and women are read as such through their citations of the racialised and classed discourses of gender and sexuality circulating in particular (i.e. national) contexts. They come to 'exist' in the ways which they are conceived; rendered intelligible and meaningful by the discourses which are available to make them so. Besides circulating within text and speech, Youdell draws upon Bourdieu's notion of the habitus to capture how bodies also come to take on and display dispositions and markers, which have at once congealed through the repetitive citation of discourse and are made meaningful through its continual re-enactment. Here, Youdell follows Judith Butler in viewing texts, speech and bodies as discursively 'performative' –

engaged in discursive practices which simultaneously reproduce and inscribe that which they cite.

However, whilst the equivocal nature of the meaning-making which discourse makes possible highlights how it guides rather than determines, it is by the same note that certain discursive frameworks may come to dominate, prevail, and so become ‘deployed improvisationally through the micro-circuits of discursive practices in historically contingent circumstances, in the day-to-day interactions of people and practices in institutions’ (*ibid*: 36). It is through institutions that discourse comes to function as a particular form of ‘disciplinary power’ via ‘technologies’ and procedures geared towards ‘enclosure and partitioning, the establishment of functional sites, and the ranking and classification of bodies – the assembly hall, the classroom, the row of desks’ (*ibid*: 36). In this way discursive ‘truths’ concerning what is considered to be ideal and normal within particular contexts are called into being, with particular implications for those constituted in ways which fall short. Using Derrida’s analysis of the ways meaning making hinges around dominant and subordinate categories of hierarchical binary pairs, Youdell suggests that in the context of the school, the inherent normativity of such binaries is invoked within discourses such as the good/bad student and ideal/impossible learner. For instance, the discursive framework of the ‘good learner’ is marked by:

‘obedience, politeness, eagerness to learn, inquisitiveness, acquiescence to adult authority, restraint, cleanliness, asexuality, helpfulness, friendliness, good sense and common sense, childishness, maturity’ (*ibid*: 99).

In turn, the ‘ideal learner’ is:

‘constituted through discourses of ability (or intelligence) and even educability and, in the context of marketisation and the benchmarking of high stakes tests, through discourses of attainment and predicted attainment’ (*ibid*).

Yet discourses of the ideal learner and the good student are only made possible through the ‘proliferation of discourses of what it is not’ (*ibid*). They ‘call up contemporary discourses of the struggling, the lazy, the disabled, the impaired, and the disordered’ which in turn ‘implicitly echo older but now formally discredited discourses of deficit, retardation and... educability’ (*ibid*). For Youdell, it follows that the coalescence of discourses which bring

constellations of identity categories such as ‘feminine, middle class, white’ into being within schools will bear varying degrees of congruence with those of the good, ideal, acceptable, normal student and learner and thereby set the limits of success within ‘the terms of prevailing educational and policy discourses’ (*ibid*: 2).

Using this framework, Youdell draws upon cross-national ethnographic work conducted in two schools - one in London, the other in Sydney. Rather than either generating descriptions of particular contexts and what happens within them or reaching for the perceptions and understandings participants have of their settings and the discourses circulating within them, her aim is to use interview, observation, artefacts and texts in order to identify ‘discourses and their effects’ (*ibid*: 56). That is, to access the ‘sites and occasions in which discourses circulate, performatives are deployed and subjects are constituted’ (*ibid*: 67). Presenting a series of ‘data episodes’ (*ibid*: 175), Youdell engages in a deep, deconstructive analysis of the constellations of discourses cited in talk, text and action and which constitute subjectivities that bear varying degrees of correspondence to the demands of the school. For instance, these analyses explore examples in which the bodily comportment of a white working-class male student upsets the hierarchical binaries of teacher/student, man/boy; the interactions and linguistic exchanges of a white, working class female student with her teacher calls up slanderous discourses of low-class femininity to momentarily push the terms of their relationship beyond that of teacher/student; the variegated ways in which the discursive performatives of white, working class femininity and masculinity (such as brushing hair or play-fighting in class) constitute subjects in relation to the school’s normative centre. All these performatives are seen to cite and inscribe the Same and the Other and are instances and differing degrees to which subjects are positioned counter to the norms and requirements of school. Indeed, these ‘episodes’ are intended as indicative examples of the subtle, mundane, and countless everyday discursive performances which act to exclude and include students in ways which come to harden and congeal over the course of their schooling, and to thereby set limits on the kinds of students and learners they can be. However, Youdell constantly returns to the argument that the equivocal nature of discourse and its constitution of subjectivity carries political potential. She suggests that the non-necessary relationship between discourse and subjectivity ‘has massive implications for education because it insists that nobody is necessarily anything and so what it means to be a teacher, a student, a learner might be opened up to radical rethinking’ (*ibid*: 43). Alongside the need to challenge policy discourses which constitute the ideal learner in limited and unyielding ways, she argues that the discourse performances which constitute educational inequalities might be undercut by teachers who involve themselves in the task of reflexive

engagement with the micro-processes of exclusion and inclusion played out from moment to moment within their classrooms. Moreover, Youdell (*ibid*: 183) suggests that the same analytical tools might ‘be made widely available through continuing professional development and initial teacher training.’

Such work provides a link between the endless moment-to-moment processes of ‘becoming’ that are worked out interactionally through the medium of widely circulating discourses that intersect with the aims, purposes and requirements of schools. In this way, the wider education policy regime is seen to be implicated in the processes of educational exclusion through its invocation of particular discursive constitutions of the ideal learner. Yet the particular nature of Youdell’s ethnographic account – her looking for ‘discourse in action’ and its effects (*ibid*: 56) – means that the readings, perspectives and experiences of pupils and teachers themselves are absent from her study. By the same note, the education policy regime and the structures, relations and rhythms it encourages have a tacit presence in her analysis, rather than providing a continual point of reference.

### ***Summary***

Following preceding chapters in their explorations of the ways class has been effaced within politics and education policy, this chapter has examined its marginalisation within academic agendas. Moving beyond traditional, materially-rooted conceptualisations of class, it explored the ways in which new directions of class analysis have developed readings of class in which its associated inequalities are also seen to circulate through and within cultural and symbolic realms. This was complimented by explorations of a diverse range of research examining the variegated ways in which class can be seen as encoded within people’s sense of themselves and the conditions which they encounter and engage with; wider processes of representation, stereotyping and stigmatisation; and how these can begin to filter into interaction. It was argued that in viewing class as a relational and dynamic process played out at the macro and micro levels of everyday life and across societal fields and sub-fields, new directions in class analysis bear a large degree of congruence with strong/hierarchical versions of exclusion, and that the concept of social exclusion might be used to explore the processes by which class is made and remade as people are interpersonally and institutionally marginalised.

Indeed, with varying degrees of sympathy to RED and a subsequent concern for the relationship between poverty and social exclusion, academic versions of social exclusion differ from those rooted within political discourse in favouring causal explanations which highlight

the role of global, national and local contexts; how they relate to social divisions, welfare provision, poverty and disadvantage; the political, economic and social roles of institutions; and the agency of other, more powerful groups. Produced within these layers and dimensions, whilst social exclusion is thereby seen to be a relational and dynamic process, empirical research suggests that in the absence of any concrete category of the 'social excluded' the idea of exclusion best captures the marginalisation of people within particular fields and sub-fields of society. In a similar way, whilst closely bound to poverty, social exclusion is seen to overlap rather than map directly onto material disadvantage. Whilst the scope of this version of exclusion is subsequently much greater than that of weak/horizontal versions, it is also able to draw in complex lines of division and inequality. In particular, the relationality of the concept closely pin-points 'who' is being excluded through the dynamic processes of exclusion and 'who' might be animating these processes, drawing attention to different identity categories and their associated inequalities through and against which relationality is played out.

However, the discussion also pointed to a tendency within social exclusion research for class to be reduced to a descriptive and economic variable relating to a distributive sphere of justice. In this respect, class has featured little in explorations of the cultural and symbolic aspects of social exclusion more readily associated with other nodes of division and inequality bound to the politics of (mis)recognition. Whilst Lister (2004) has explored these aspects of exclusion as harms relating to material disadvantage, it was argued that between poverty's close relationship to class and its overlapping rather than direct convergence with social exclusion, there is a need for wider explorations of the relationship between class and these aspects of exclusion across societal fields and sub-fields. Taking a closer look at strong/hierarchical research which has worked more tightly with the impact of class within education, it was suggested that MacDonald & Marsh's (2005) biographical approach was well suited to the exploration of social exclusion as a dynamic process and the accompanying ways in which it is experienced in ongoing and various ways at the level of everyday life embedded within particular contexts and conditions. It was also suggested that Youdell (2006) provides an important link between the discourses surrounding class and the minutia of classroom interaction, calling for greater recognition of the (re)production of inequalities within and through education by teachers and in their training. However, it was argued that missing from both are clear in-depth explorations of the experiential impact of the structures, relations and rhythms of schooling encountered by working class people, framed by the logic of wider education policy regime. From here, the discussion moves to map out the ways in which these



theoretical and conceptual frameworks have informed the methodological contours of the current project.

# 5

## **Methodology.**

### ***Introduction.***

The core aim of this chapter is to situate and describe the contours of the present study in relation to the broader and shifting landscape of research and policy around social class within English secondary education. It thereby begins with ontological and epistemological discussions which map out the assumptions regarding the nature of the social world underpinning the study, and with its specific aims and purposes in mind, sets out the ways in which it might best be explored. In this respect, qualitative approaches are identified as key to exploring the everyday and ongoing processes and experiences that precede and underpin the generation of quantitative data relating to classed-based educational inequalities and social exclusion. In viewing both class and social exclusion as relational, dynamic and processual aspects of the social world, it argues that a biographically orientated interview approach with working class young people is particularly well attuned to explorations of the variegated ways in which class-based inequalities and social exclusion intersect within educational contexts. In turn, a semi-structured interview approach is identified as an appropriate way in which to explore with educational professionals the ways in which the education policy regime filters into schools and influences the institutional structures, processes and professional practices which confront working class pupils on a daily basis. It is also argued that such a research strategy provides a way in which to explore how working class pupils and the societal and educational process which shape their educational experiences and outcomes are understood by those trained and charged to teach in an education system intimately bound to the (re)production of class inequalities and social exclusion.

This discussion is followed by a logistical account of the project, which is divided into two sections. The first describes the ways in which samples of 9 teachers and 3 student support staff were generated via 3 secondary schools with a further sample of 9 teacher trainees generated via 2 universities. The second describes the process by which a sample of 17 working class young people between the ages of 16 and 18 was generated via a range of sites and organisations. Each section contains discussions of the ethical considerations which infused the project and accounts of the decisions and issues which arose regarding access, informed consent, and the design and implementation of the tools and techniques used for the

generation of data. A third and final section concludes with an exploration of the tools and techniques used for the analysis of data.

### ***Ontological & Epistemological Overview.***

Within the social sciences, the term ontology is used in reference to claims regarding the constitutive ‘range of things, relations and processes’ that make up the social world (Benton & Craib, 2001: 5). In this respect, debates about the contemporary salience of class are essentially ontological; struggles over whether or not class continues to exist in ways which animate and shape the social world. This study follows Savage (2000) in recognising a ‘paradox of class’ in which a disjuncture has opened up between the continuing structural impact of class and self-consciousness. Yet, in turn, it also follows new directions in class analysis in which this change is not misrecognised and ‘confused with decline’ (Roberts, 2001: 12). Indeed, at one level the material facts of class – differences in health, housing, mortality, education, (un)employment and mobility – have persisted irrespective of shifts in the kinds of class consciousness and self-awareness which may once have accompanied them (Savage, 2002). Yet as Roberts (2001) points out, the real challenge is to account for these inequalities *without* drawing upon class as an explanatory concept.

This study begins from the position that in a world soaked through with the inequalities broadly mapped and described by quantitative enquirers, there are everyday and ongoing processes and experiences that precede and underpin the generation of such data. Like Charlesworth (2000), it reaches for things which are not easily expressed by numbers, drawing upon new directions in class analysis in which class is seen to be ‘something which happens’ – an ongoing and lived process and structure of thinking, feeling, acting and relating which is peppered with intermittent levels of awareness and continues to flavour people’s trajectories through time and space. In turn, class is seen as something which can be glimpsed like shadows scattered throughout what people do and say about themselves, their lives, their experiences, and those of other people. Epistemologically then, this study adopts a qualitative way of knowing this ontological terrain – a mode of enquiry attuned to the generation of ‘thick descriptions’ detailing the tones and textures of everyday life and experience and best suited to explorations of the subtle and nuanced intricacies of the social world.

Yet in shifting the focus to the level of everyday life and experience, that which is general and common is inevitably revealed as being animated and interwoven with grades of variation and difference. In this sense, class is seen to be general and omnipresent without being monolithic

and homogenising. As past, present and future hubs through which a complex array of threads are stitched together, it is at the level of individual biographies that this kaleidoscopic mix of similarity and difference is most clearly revealed. Individual biographies are both products and records of past processes, relations and experiences, which are interspersed with an intersecting tapestry of novel twists and turns, triumphs and tragedies, wins and failures. Working at this interface is to trace the ways in which individual trajectories take shape within certain conditions and contexts, and to begin teasing out the general in the particular. In this sense, the study follows Mills (1959: 3) in his assertions that ‘neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both’. Indeed, for Mills, the promise of sociology lingers in its ability to unpick the interpenetration of individual and society, suggesting that ‘no social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within society has completed its intellectual journey’ (*ibid*: 6).

This ontological and epistemological stance has underpinned the decision to undertake biographically orientated interview work with young people in order to explore the variegated and subtle ways in which educational exclusion can be analysed through the lens of class. Indeed, in assessing the limitations of existing data sources for the quantitative analysis of social exclusion, Levitas *et al* (2007: 126) point out that qualitative approaches employing biographical techniques are particularly well placed to ‘identify exclusionary processes and experiences’, offering insights into the complexity and sequence of events and experiences which can generate or challenge exclusion. In this sense, the study draws upon a strong/hierarchical version of exclusion as ‘something that happens’ – a processual and relational aspect of the social which permeates the domains of a society shot through with cross-cutting lines of inequality and division. In a similar way to class then, social exclusion is seen to colour the experiences and events that flesh out the contours of individual lives and feed into the generation of quantitative data. Yet in carrying out biographical research with young people, this study also keys into a particular ontological view of young people which is drawn from child-centred research. In contrast to dominant frameworks stressing the fundamentally immature and developmental nature of children - with childhood cast as a kind of ‘pre-social’, biological stage in the evolution towards adulthood, rationality and full social status (Prout & James, 2003: 10) – this approach adopts an alternative ontology in which children are repositioned as ‘social actors with their own stories to tell’ (Ridge, 2000: 57). Transformed from research objects into research subjects, childhood moves from the fringes of adult social worlds, emerging as another social world which is important and worthy of study

as such. Ethically, this ontological position demands that ways of knowing children and young people's lives not only embody the same levels of respect required of adult-centred research, but an accompanying sensitivity and reflexive engagement with intergenerational power imbalances.

Yet such an endeavour also calls for an appreciation of the structures from, through and against which individual lives are worked out – an understanding of how and by whom the conditions and contexts from which they strike out are generated and sustained in ways which (re)produce the broad patterns of the social world revealed in quantitative work. In drawing upon a strong/hierarchical version of social exclusion, emphasis is placed on explorations of exclusionary aspects of the social world that look beyond 'the excluded' to the structures, processes and the relations of society and its constitutive fields. In this respect, detailed accounts of both policy and research have been used to sketch out and sensitise us to the nature and form of the educational landscape encountered by both pupils *and* teachers. Yet, in a similar way to Ball (2008: 7), this study works from the position that:

'policies are contested, interpreted and enacted in a variety of arenas of practice and the rhetoric's, texts and meanings of policy makers do not always translate directly and obviously into institutional practices. They are inflected, mediated, resisted and misunderstood, or in some cases simply prove unworkable. It is also important not to overestimate the logical rationality of policy. Policy strategies, Acts, guidelines and initiatives are often messy, contradictory, confused and unclear.'

This perspective has underpinned the decision to undertake qualitative interview work with teachers as a technique by which to gain a feel for the nature of the educational structures and processes that contextualise and contain the biographies of the young people. In this respect, it draws upon Lipsky's (1983) ontological portrayal of public service workers as 'street-level bureaucrats' able to use varying amounts of discretion amongst the degrees of regulation and standardisation which characterise public service institutions. Teachers are thereby seen to be key mediators of that which is not only intended to (re)calibrate the form, content and purposes of formal education, but which also attempts to sculpt the nature and scope of the work they carry out within it. At the same time, as embedded social beings, teachers are seen to embody their own particular perceptual schemas, which may feed into actions such as policy mediation. In a Bourdieuan sense, they too are the unfolding products of their immersion within

particular temporal, spatial, cultural and socio-economic locations and must draw upon both accrued and emerging knowledge of the social world in order to engage and negotiate it.

Parallel to all this, the study also works from a series of wider and interconnected ontological and value positions regarding the nature of educational inequality and injustice. Indeed, it follows Halsey's (1972) suggestion that whatever terms such as 'ability', 'potential', 'capacity' and 'intelligence' attempt to grasp, it is randomly distributed throughout society in ways which alert us to the existence of injustice wherever variations in educational outcomes occur between its different constitutive social groups. In this respect, whilst efforts to achieve greater measures of equality of opportunity are seen to be crucially important, for Halsey (*ibid*: 8) there is a superseding imperative for an increased equality of outcome whereby 'the median member of each identifiable non-educationally defined group... should have the same level of educational attainment as the average male, white, white-collar, suburbanite. If not there has been injustice'. Rather than producing mediocrity and stifling difference, like Whitty (2002), this study rests on the premise that achieving greater equality of outcome in education is an important component in the generation of a more genuine diversity. This is not to miss the dystopian irony contained within Young's (1958) description of a truly meritocratic society in which existing mechanisms and criteria for the (re)production of inequalities and elites are replaced with another. Nor is it to slip into to a 'naïve possibilitarianism' in which the complexities of such aims are overlooked (Whitty, 2001: 288). Instead, the contours of this position are sketched out and intended as a kind of compass, which is at once pragmatic and utopian – an orientation informing what should be perpetually sought, encouraged and maximised (Levitas, 2005a).

### **Section 1: Practicing Teachers & PGCE Students.**

Having examined the ways in which over a century of education policy has come to impact upon working class educational experiences and outcomes, the core purpose of carrying out interview work with teachers was to investigate the impact of the current education policy regime upon the institutional structures, processes and professional practice which confront working class pupils on a daily basis. Having also explored the corresponding ways in which teachers have been caught in the ebb and flow of educational struggles heavily imbued with issues of class – particularly its more recent effacement from education policy, Initial Teacher Training (ITT), and its wider political and popular reconfigurations – a related aim was to examine the ways in which working class pupils and the contexts and conditions which shape

their educational experiences and outcomes were understood by teachers. In particular, this underpinned the decision to interview not only practicing teachers, but those who were also in the throws of their ITT so as to gain more detailed insight into the ways in which they were prepared to teach in an education system permeated by extensive class-based inequalities. Samples were generated via 3 secondary schools and 2 universities in urban areas of the south west of England. The final sample contained 9 teachers, 9 PGCE students and 3 student support staff. Taking place during the spring and summer of 2009, interviews followed a one-to-one semi-structured format, lasted between 50 minutes and 1.5 hours, and were recorded and fully transcribed.

### ***A Qualitative Interview Approach.***

In adopting qualitative methodologies researchers themselves often become the primary research ‘technology’ or ‘tool’ by which data is generated (Bryman, 2004). Once in the ‘the field’ for example, the success or failure of a survey questionnaire is chiefly dependant upon its design and deployment, whereas for qualitative interviewers this will hinge largely upon ‘the personal and professional qualities of the individual interviewer’ (Legard *et al*, 2003: 142). Indeed, qualitative interviews not only depend upon the researcher’s ability to develop the kinds of trust, empathy and rapport which will enable and encourage respondents to speak (Denscombe, 1998), they also involve them ‘actively ‘listening’ to what the researched say’ before responding with questions that will further open up the issues and topics being explored (Oakley, 1999: 155). Thus, while extremely challenging, this interactivity affords qualitative interviewers a huge amount of flexibility, and their ability to respond and adapt during the course of an interview gives this qualitative way of knowing its particular power and appeal (Mason, 1996).

In addition, Fielding & Thomas (2001: 125) suggest that ‘if you are on new ground - for social research or yourself - a more flexible approach is best’. With no first-hand knowledge of the teaching profession, taking an interview approach which allowed me to ask for clarifications and deeper explanations where needed not only limited the loss of meaning which may have occurred within a more structured approach, but also meant that interviews could potentially spill into areas which I was unable to anticipate in advance.

Sayer (2002: 2) has explored the ways in which class can often stir-up feelings of shame, embarrassment, unease and defensiveness - feelings to which Sayer suggests many researchers become de-sensitised during the course of their enquiries. In this respect, he suggests the kind

of ‘blasé amoralism’ that researchers sometimes bring to their empirical work can have an important bearing upon the kind of responses they get (*ibid*). A qualitative approach, which allowed me to remain responsive to the language and ways with which respondents were comfortable about approaching issues of working-class educational inequalities, thereby allowed for a greater degree of sensitivity concerning the ‘moral implications of class’ (*ibid*: 3). This more ‘practical’ set of considerations also sat alongside the study’s core epistemological imperatives. Indeed, I was interested in aspects of people’s lives which could not be expressed numerically or adequately captured by standardised tools or techniques. As Bryman points out, the power of qualitative research lies in its ability to examine ‘the ways in which people understand and interpret their social reality’ (cited in Snape & Spencer, 2003: 3). Indeed, I sought to explore the personal and ‘professional world views’ of respondents and to examine not only how and where working class pupils were positioned within them, but also how the societal and educational processes which re/produce their educational experiences and outcomes were interpreted and understood.

### ***Sampling & Access.***

Generating samples of both practicing teachers and PGCE students presented a number of specific methodological issues and difficulties. Indeed, Ritchie *et al* (2003) suggests that when attempting to develop sample frames of professionals, both professional registers and the organisations in which they work provide the most logical starting points. However, a number of researchers have pointed to the hostility which can sometimes meet educational research of a sociological and qualitative nature after it was publically slammed in the late 1990’s by government funded reviews (Hammersley, 2000; Walford, 2001; Delamont, 2000; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Given the potentially sensitive nature of the themes and issues I wished to explore, I was initially very cautious about approaching official organisations and institutions in order to generate samples.

Yet at the same time, I also wanted to avoid generating convenience samples via methods such as ‘snowball sampling’ in which chains of participants are accessed as each participant arranges contact with the next (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). Indeed, as Ritchie *et al* (2003) point out, despite being statistically unrepresentative, for researchers who use non-probabilistic sampling techniques there is still a desire to pull together as large a range of experience as possible so as to increase the breadth and complexity of findings. In this respect, I sought to generate data with a range of teachers both within and across schools in order to gain a feel for the ways in which the current education policy regime fed into the institutional structures,



processes and professional practice which confront working class pupils on a daily basis. I thereby aimed to work with the complex and particular whilst also reaching for that which was more general and widespread.

For these reasons I decided to draw on my own network of personal contacts in order to find teachers willing to assist in making contact with relevant gatekeepers in three secondary schools in the south west of England – St Justine’s, The Meadows, and John Marsh High<sup>16</sup>. All three were in urban areas and were selected on account of their being situated in working class neighbourhoods. John Marsh High served an area suffering from many of the joined-up problems of social exclusion - ‘a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown’ (SEU, 1997) - and both The Meadows and St Justine’s drew substantial numbers of their pupils from similar areas. The purpose of using initial contacts to establish contact with relevant gatekeepers was to minimise the chances of receiving a flat negative response from gatekeepers and to sensitise them to the core thrust of the project before contacting them directly. In all three cases gatekeepers were Deputy Heads who were more closely bound to the day-to-day running of schools than were Headteachers, and in all three cases each was willing to receive more information about the project via email.

Besides giving an overview of the project, emails explained that I was interested in interviewing 3-4 teaching staff for around an hour and that their identities and that of the school would be treated with the strictest of confidence at all times. In all three cases gatekeepers were positive and enthusiastic about assisting, and whilst The Meadows preferred to forward a letter from myself to staff via the school’s internal email system, both St Justine’s and John Marsh High preferred to provide details of those they had approached and for me to then take things from there. Whilst I received a total of 12 contact details for teachers, the final number of those interviewed was from this list of contacts was 8. Indeed, even though some may have expressed an initial interest in the project I decided to limit efforts to contact those who failed to respond to an initial email to a single follow-up email on the basis that silences may have indicated lack of interest or inability to take part.

Serendipity also led to the development of a further layer to the sample. Indeed, despite my stated interest in teachers, St Justine’s and John Marsh High each provided contact details for student support staff whose roles only transpired when finally meeting for interviews.

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<sup>16</sup> All the names of institutions, organisations and research participants have been anonymised throughout.

Following these two interviews, I subsequently sought out an equivalent participant at The Meadows, bringing the total to three. Finally, I was also able to interview a ninth teacher from a fourth school who contacted me with a request to take part in the project after another participant had discussed their own involvement.

Whilst it might have been possible to have drawn a sample of PGCE students on teaching placements at St Justine's, The Meadows and John Marsh High, it was not clear as to whether I would have been able to reach my desired number of 10 interviews. Furthermore, amongst juggling the challenges of their placements and ongoing university assignments, I felt that approaching students whilst at university would be much more convenient for them and ensure an adequate number of participants. As with schools, I began with a university in which I had an initial contact who was willing to assist in making contact with the relevant gatekeeper. With the gatekeeper happy to receive more information about the project I emailed an overview of the study in which I outlined my interest in interviewing 10 PGCE students for around one hour and explained that the identities of participants and that of the university would be treated with the strictest of confidence at all times. Yet after several weeks, with no response to follow up enquires and no initial contacts elsewhere I began sending introductory e-mails to PGCE programme administrators in other nearby universities. Whilst receiving acknowledgement replies from all, only one programme administrator contacted me again soon after stating that they were happy to help, and that they would forward students a letter from me via e-mail. At the same time, I was contacted by the gatekeeper from the first university with an invite to address their cohort of PGCE students during the first lecture following several weeks of school placement. During this time, I was able to give a brief overview of the project, set out what their participation would involve, distribute letters listing my contact details, and request that anyone interested in participating write their e-mail address on a sheet of paper for me to collect at the end of the lecture. After receiving contact details for a total 18 PGCE students, the final number of those interviewed was 8. Serendipity also led to the inclusion of a ninth PGCE student on placement at John Marsh High whose role in the school transpired during our email exchanges after his contact details were given to me along with those of teachers.

### ***Ethical Considerations & Informed Consent.***

Having gained access to both sample populations via gatekeepers, issues of access became more closely entwined with ethical issues and informed consent. As Kimmel (1988: 67) points out, many researchers consider the negotiation of access and the gaining of informed consent

to be ‘the central norm governing the relationship between the investigator and the research participant’. Indeed, it is one of the key areas through which researchers demonstrate whether or not they have conducted research which is ethically robust (Bryman, 2004). Ethical obligations in this area stem from the notion that people have a right to know about and be in control of what happens to them and what they involve themselves in (Israel & Hay, 2006). Moreover, through their participation in research, individuals disclose details and information about themselves and/or aspects of the social world which place a huge amount of responsibility upon researchers to treat such disclosures with appropriate care (Bulmer, 2001).

However, many researchers have pointed to the way in which conducting ethical research and gaining informed consent is a processual endeavour (Silverman, 2006; Bryman, 2004; Walford, 2001), and in this respect I treated my initial contact with gatekeepers as part of a much longer procedure which continued into the moments when I finally met respondents in person and into the interview process itself. Although bound up with further ethical challenges, these issues and requirements also fed into the biographically orientated interviews carried out with young people. Besides gaining ethical approval from my university department, throughout the processes of gaining informed consent I not only adhered closely to the British Sociological Associations ‘Guidelines on Research Ethics’, but also sought to learn from existing methodological literatures in an effort to pre-empt and negotiate ethical issues.

Indeed, given the variegated ways in which potential participants had been informed about the project, their contact details collected, and the amount of time which had since elapsed, during initial and second email enquiries I was careful to (re)state who I was, the institution to which I was attached, how I had received their contact details, the core thrust of the project, that their potential involvement would entail a one-to-one relaxed and informal interview lasting approximately one hour, that their identity and that of any institutions to which they were attached would be anonymised, that interviews could be arranged at a time and place most convenient to them, and that I was able to leave them with a gift of £15 for their time. I also made it clear that although they had already expressed interest in taking part in the study, emails were intended as enquiries, and that I would look forward to hearing back from respondents if they still felt able and willing to take part. Ethically, presenting the project and what their potential involvement would entail in terms of topic, process, time and treatment of data along with clear efforts to present involvement as an opt-in process attempted to maximise the degree of control potential participants had over their involvement (Bryman, 2004). Indeed,

the ethical importance of emphasising this was especially acute where individuals considered suitable for the project had been approached individually by gatekeepers in St Justine's and John Marsh High. In such situations Lewis (2003: 67) warns that there is a danger that the ability of participants to enter freely into the research may be influenced by any 'feelings of obligation or gratitude' which may exist between them and the person organising their participation.

For those who responded to initial and second enquiry emails and for whom interviews were eventually scheduled, I was also careful to reiterate these points when finally meeting in person. Whilst the three schools which had arranged access to teachers were happy for me to use their facilities for interviews, where PGCE students wished to do the same I asked that they gained permission from their placement schools beforehand<sup>17</sup>. Whilst school-based interviews took place during free-periods, dinner-times, or after school, several respondents preferred to meet during evenings or weekends and choose venues such as quiet pubs or cafes. When settled in a venue and having re-iterated the key thrust of the study, I was particularly concerned that participants were aware that whilst their names and those of the institutions would be anonymised, beyond their own disclosures to colleagues within and across schools and the fact that gatekeepers knew of their potential participation, I would not disclose their taking part to anybody else. On a similar note, after asking if they were happy for me to record interviews, I explained that recordings would be safely stored on a hard-drive with password access and then erased after full transcriptions had been completed. Whilst stressing that we could pause or stop recording at any moment, I also made it clear that participants should feel able to terminate the interview at any point. Finally, before interviews began I asked participants to sign both a consent form stating that I had explained the research and what their involvement entailed, and a receipt of payment form. At the same time, I was careful to explain that whilst committing their names to paper in such ways, forms would be securely stored and only see the light of day if any issues regarding themselves and the research arose.

On top of their intrinsic ethical importance, there were several other reasons why I worked hard to ensure that respondents understood that these were issues which I took seriously. Indeed, Israel & Hay (2006) have emphasised the way in which whilst in 'the field', researchers become representatives of their profession, research communities, and the

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<sup>17</sup> Note that although I originally intended to have accessed PGCE students via Universities so as to be more convenient to them to hold interviews on campus, the protracted nature of negotiating access meant that many participants were back on placements by the time interviews came to be scheduled.

institutions of which they are part, and therefore have a duty to behave in a way which will pave the way for future researchers. Given the damaged status of educational sociology then, this was a modest but important way in which I could potentially raise the profile of such work as a professionally sound endeavour amongst a small number of teachers, many of whom were at the beginning of their careers. In this respect it was also an important means by which I could establish my own status as a professional. Indeed, although one of the reasons I had adopted a qualitative research strategy was to compensate for limitations in my own knowledge of the teaching profession, as Silverman (2006: 112) points out, it is still important that interviewers remain 'active participants' who continue to guide respondents through the issues and topics and do not allow themselves to be 'dominated' by interviewees. Finally, I hoped that demonstrating my commitment to these issues would allow me to gain respondents trust and thereby provide the context in which they felt able speak frankly and openly with me about their thoughts and experiences.

### ***Design & Deployment.***

In order to remain responsive and adaptable without losing direction or sight of the key themes and issues to be explored, interviews followed a semi-structured format. Whilst one of the main advantages of qualitative interviews is that their flexibility allows the contours and shape of each individual interview to differ from the next, Arthur & Nazroo (2003: 112) point out they are nonetheless 'processes with their own dynamic... [meaning] that different issues are best addressed at different stages of the process', and that developing a 'rational order' to interview guides is of particular importance. For instance, whilst they note the importance of beginning interviews with simple and descriptive questions which allow respondents to accustom themselves to the nature and content of interviews before moving onto the more central themes, Legard *et al* (2003: 144) point to the way in which interviewers also need 'to signal the return back to the everyday level'. In this respect the interview guide opened with questions concerning respondents' decisions to enter the teaching profession and their training courses, and later attempted to 'wind-down' with questions which looked to the future, and the general challenges currently facing the teaching profession.

The flexibility of such an approach thereby allowed for a degree of coherence within and across interviews whilst also allowing them to be developed and fleshed out in ways which were specific to individual contexts. Sometimes, issues raised across several interviews could be explored within those which followed and developed into specific themes. For instance, one theme which emerged early on and was subsequently incorporated into other interviews were

issues relating to The Fischer Family Trust (FFT), an independent organisation that compiles data for individual pupils when entering secondary school and draws upon area of residence to calculate expected GCSE grades. Previously unaware of FFT, the flexibility of a qualitative approach allowed me to explore its significance. At the same time, this flexibility also allowed me to remain sensitive to language relating to specific contexts, procedures or even the key thrust of interviews. For instance, whilst Linda (Teacher, John Marsh High) declared very early on that she was ‘not into social class and banding people, oh no, no, that’s my mothers era’, I was able to drop the concept of class from my questioning whilst remaining sensitive to the ways in which it continued to animate her account.

However, besides the structure and content of interviews, the interactive nature of qualitative interviewing raises a number of important issues concerning ‘questions of social power and identity’ (Sikes, 2004: 27). Indeed, Denscombe (1998: 169) points out that ‘research on interviewing has demonstrated fairly conclusively that people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions’. In this respect I was concerned that interviews may have been influenced by aspects of my identity which respondents may have perceived to be indicators of a working class habitus. In particular, many researchers have pointed to the way in which accent can be an important marker of class (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Skeggs, 1997; Charlesworth, 2000; Savage *et al*, 2001). Given Sayers (2002) warnings that approaching the subject of class empirically can invoke defensive responses from respondents, I worried that my own regional accent may have impeded my ability to explore issues of working-class educational inequalities with members of what is a largely middle-class profession (Tomlinson, 2005). However, besides the open and frank nature of many responses, instances in which respondents openly identified with me by using pronouns such as ‘us’ or ‘we’ when making comparisons between different social groups suggested that my status as researcher may have defied my origins. At the same time, I sought to minimise difference by adopting the same style of dress as teachers so as to make it easier for them to talk about differences which may also have been anchored within this aspect of the social.

However, one area where my personal identity inevitably had a huge impact upon both the nature of interviews, respondents’ replies, and indeed the entire study, were the various values that I brought to the research. Indeed, qualitative interviews are not inert mechanisms by which the world is ‘knowable’. Rather than ‘passive filters’ (Silverman, 2006: 118) through which ‘truths’ come flowing, the insights which respondents yield during interviews percolate through in a form which is altered and tainted by the ‘medium of the interview’ through which

it has passed. As Rapley (2004) points out, such insights are not direct representations which can then be seamlessly re-mapped onto the social phenomena they purport to describe. Instead, they amount to particular ‘versions’ of the world; they are ‘particular representations or accounts of an individual’s views or opinions’ (Byrne quoted in Silverman, 2006: 118). Such insights are particularistic because they have been shaped collaboratively by both researcher and respondent (Mason, 1998). Indeed, during interviews it became apparent that class-based educational inequalities constituted a single stitch in the everyday fabric of respondents’ professional lives. Yet my own explicit concern with the inequalities which saturate the education system - and in this instance my desire to approach interviews through the prism of class - meant that between constructing the interview guide, deciding where and when to probe for deeper responses, and the selection and interpretation of various experiences and understandings by respondents, accounts emerged in which class featured as the major theme. Yet as Rapley (2004: 21-22) suggests, ‘in other interactions, with other questions, other... truths would emerge’. This does not render qualitative insights as anecdotal and invalid, but rather, demands a degree of realism with regards to the *kinds* of data such research generates (Mason, 1996). In this respect, the accounts which respondents gave are not treated as straightforward ‘reports’, but rather, ‘displays of perspectives’ (Silverman, 2006: 144). They provide glimpses and whispers of how participants see and understand the world, which in turn sensitise us to the way things might be elsewhere. Following feminist writers such as Skeggs (1997: 33) then, I attempted to use my value position as a resource; a means by which I might recognise and tease out ‘things that others would prefer to overlook (gender, race, class, etc.)’. This allowed me to ask questions which constantly obliged respondents to consider the education system in relation to working class people, producing accounts which gave a flavour of where and how they were positioned in respondents’ social worlds.

## **Section 2: Young People.**

Having examined over a century of education policy and its impact upon working class pupils, the core purpose of carrying out biographically orientated interview work with working class young people was to explore the variegated ways in which class and social exclusion intersect within the context of the current education policy regime. Indeed, against the marginalisation of class within both political and academic discourses of social exclusion, both concepts have been mapped out in ways which allow them be understood as relational, processural, and as aspects of the social world which feed into the events and experiences which steer individual trajectories through time and space. This underpinned the decision to interview working class

young people who had completed their compulsory schooling within the last 2 years in order to look back at the particular ways in which educational trajectories were worked out within, through and against the impact of the education policy regime as mediated and mapped out by teachers, trainee teachers and students support staff. The sample of 17 young people (11 male, 7 female) was generated via The Meadows, a branch of Connexions<sup>18</sup>, and two young people's training centres in the same urban areas as the schools via which the sample of teachers was generated. Taking place during the summer and autumn of 2009, biographically oriented interviews were one-to-one, lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours, and were recorded and fully transcribed.

### ***A Biographical Approach.***

Whilst tracing its development to earlier periods, Chamberlayne *et al* (2000) point to an intensification of a 'biographical turn' within sociology during the 1990's. In part, this owed much to the 'cultural turn' and accompanying efforts to access and document the lives and experiences of those previously marginalised within social scientific enquiry. In particular, feminists used biographical approaches to explore marriage, domestic life, labour, sexuality, motherhood and to trace the ways in which connected oppressions surfaced in the present (Wengraf, 2002). This intensification also owed much to the fact that social change since the 1970's had done much to erode meta-theoretical accounts of individual and society to the point where postmodern emphases upon identities as constructed, multiple and flee-floating came to prominence (Chamberlayne *et al*, 2000). In the UK, this also intersected with a Conservative political agenda that peddled an individualism which deemphasised the social (Evans, 1993). In this respect, conditions were such that a swing back to structurally informed analyses was 'inevitable' (Wengraf, 2002: 246), with biographical approaches providing a way in which to re-socialise the individual by exploring biographical experiences and accounts in relation to their wider social contexts (Coffey, 2001).

Indeed, whilst biographical approaches entail a rejection of 'any notion that 'a life' can be understood as representative of a single self in isolation from networks of interwoven biography' (Stanley & Morgan, 1993: 2), they also entail an engagement with the institutions, structures and processes through, within, and against which lives take shape (Coffey, 2001). Biographical approaches generate data of a 'temporal quality' within which people's movements through (social) space and time can be traced (*ibid*: 56). As Atkinson (1998: 20) points out, 'there may be no better way to answer the question of how people get from where

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<sup>18</sup> A national network of information and advisory centres for young people.



they began, to where they are now in life than through their life stories'. Indeed, biographical approaches invite people to look back in detail at their lives (Bryman, 2004) to explore the various phases, events and experiences that have influenced a person's trajectory. In a related way, they seek to examine how these were perceived and understood, how people came to 'define the world around them' (Faraday & Plummer, 1979: 776), and how their interpretations in turn came to shape particular courses of action. In this respect, biographical approaches aim to 'set personal stories within wider contexts' (Watts & Bridges, 2006: 1), and in doing so attempt to capture the ways in which structure and agency merge and mingle to form the complex weave of both which mark and sculpt biographies. In this way, explorations of biographies not only 'illuminate understanding of the individual, but also contribute to understanding of the general' (Evans (1993: 9), and in gathering narratives and biographies together researchers can add increasing amounts of depth and breath to this 'broader picture' (Coffey, 2001: 55).

However, many researchers have questioned the status of biographical knowledge. Indeed, at one level there is the outright impossibility of both exploring and condensing lives in their entirety (Stanley & Morgan, 1993). At the same time, Gardener (2001: 193, 192) has suggested that biographical approaches 'cannot provide anything like a complete and accurate picture of events and processes' given that both 'neurological and psychological processes mean that memories of many events and experiences, particularly if not considered salient, 'decays' over time'. Moreover, the processes involved in recalling and remembering are extremely complex in their own right (*ibid*).

It has been suggested that researchers should embrace the inherent 'ambivalence in remembering rather than staying with the apparent security of more 'positivist and historicist approaches' (Wengraf *et al*, 2002: 249). Stanley & Morgan (1993: 3) argue that in part, this requires sociologists to work analytically with the social construction of time and accompanying tendencies for 'authorial usages and disruptions of chronicity'. In this respect, they suggest that:

'one example here is of the compression of sometimes long and actually eventful periods of time in order to dwell on other periods deemed more significant. This is not necessarily consciously artful, either in order to serve rhetorical purposes or, more simply, to repress the truth: the workings of the memory produce the same or similar selections, compressions and expansions' (*ibid*).

Indeed, while the accuracy and factual reliability of biographical accounts may be far more problematic for those researchers specifically concerned with such (i.e. historians), they may rely on parallel, perhaps official, accounts of events and/or various documents in order to triangulate ('validate') a life history. Yet for those researchers concerned to explore the inner-worlds, interpretations and understandings of events and experiences and how they have come to shape a person's life, this kind of 'validation' is extremely difficult to establish (Bryman, 2004). However, Atkinson (1998: 60) suggests that:

'the way a personal narrative is recounted at any point in one's life represents the most internally consistent interpretation of the way the past, the experienced present, and the anticipated future is presently understood by that person'.

That is, a life history should, at any one point, be 'consistent within itself' (*ibid*); should have an '*internal consistency*' which is sequential and directional. On top of this, Stanley & Morgan (1993) suggest that issues of memory and accuracy also feed into questions relating to referentiality and intertextuality. Indeed, whilst far from being 'unproblematically referential of the material realities of the lives so 'described'', the rejection of:

'conventional referential claims does not require us to go to the other extreme and deny that there is any significant relationship between 'the life' as it was lived and 'the life' as it has been written. Rather it directs us to accept the manifold complexities of the relationship as crucial analytical material' (*ibid*).

At the heart of this relationship is a recognition of the intertextual relationship between reality and representation. Yet in acknowledging that representation is a laying out of encounters, events and experiences as perceived and interpreted by those who recount and describe them, the inherent 'inaccuracy' of this intertextuality does not require that representation be privileged over reality. Indeed, however imperfect and inaccurate, as representations of encounters with reality, biographical accounts remain anchored and orientated within and by various layers and levels of socio-historical co-ordinates in time and space which were lived through and experienced (Wengraf *et al*, 2002). As Stanley & Morgan (1993: 3) put it, such representations nevertheless 'strain to reflect the realities of living'.

Assessing the promise of biographical approaches in relation to educational research, Coffey (2001: 57) suggests that:

‘Narratives and stories, collected through a biographical approach to educational processes, provide conventions and frameworks for articulating and making sense of careers, experiences and the construction of identity. They enable the identification of key figures, incidents, turning points and epiphanies (Denzin, 1989), and thus enable the charting of decisions and progressions. This is especially important if we are to make sense of educational careers in their organisational and social context’

Indeed, whereas life history approaches attempt to examine as many aspects of a person’s life as possible, biographical approaches examine lives in relation to particular issues, themes or stages of the life course. For instance, Thomas & Znaniecki (1996 [1918]) sought to explore the experience of emigration and integration of a Polish peasant who settled in the USA, whilst Steadman (1986) examined both her and her mother’s biographies in order to explore working class girlhood and place them in their wider historical and political contexts. In relation to education, Bloomer & Hodgkinson (2000) have highlighted the usefulness of conceptualising educational biographies in terms of ‘learning careers’ in which education is explored as a particular thread or aspect of a person’s trajectory. As Goffman (cited in Gallacher *et al*, 2002: 498) suggested, ‘a career is something that can be either brilliant or disappointing: it can be no more a success than a failure’. In addition, Crossan *et al* (2003: 56) point out that the concept of ‘a career’ has both subjective and objective elements - ‘on the one hand, it points to the existence of more or less identifiable positions, statuses and situations’, whilst also highlighting an individual’s subjective experiences of moving through those positions, statuses, situations, ‘the meanings they attributed to them, and their sense of becoming a certain person’. This provides a framework through which educational biographies can be approached methodically, viewing schooling as a series of successive stages and events (primary and secondary schooling, exams, school events, academic progression, etc), via which the experiences of living through these stages and events can be traced and examined as continuous, cumulative, shifting, interrelated and lived experiences.

### ***Sampling & Access***

#### ***- Plan A: Youth Clubs.***

Generating a sample of young people raised some of the most challenging methodological issues of the project’s empirical stage. These were initially bound up with issues of access -

one of the most complicated and difficult stages of research with children and young people given the prominent position of gatekeepers (France, 2004; Alderson, 2004). As Masson (2004: 46) puts it, the fact that children and young people tend to be embedded within 'families, schools, day care and institutions means that they are rarely entirely free to decide for themselves whether or not to participate in research'. Indeed, whilst consent is traditionally required from guardians and/or gatekeepers for researchers to work with people under the age of 18, there is in fact no legal requirement to do so where informed consent has been given by children and young people themselves (Tucker, 2004). However, guardians and gatekeepers tend to control not only the points of contact with children and young people, but also 'the places... which provide the safest and most suitable venues for interviews' (Masson, 2004: 46).

I was interested in speaking to young who had finished their compulsory education within the last two years. The purpose of such selection criteria was not only to ensure participants' memories of experiences and events remained relatively lucid, but that their schooling had also taken place under the current education policy regime. I first attempted to generate a sample outside of schools for several reasons. As Robinson & Kellett (2004: 91) point out, 'school is a context in which the adult-child power imbalance is particularly acute'. Following warnings that children and young people can bring past experiences of adults such as teachers to their interactions with researchers (Coleman *et al*, 2004), I was keen to avoid any potentially negative effects upon interview data which my association with schools might have created. Moreover, France (2004: 182) has noted the tendency for schools to be 'very keen to get parental permission and normally insist that parents are given the right to stop their teenage son or daughter participating in research,' and at best this adds time to the already lengthy access process. Finally, Alderson (2004: 105) points out that 'while many children can be quickly accessed through schools' it is often the case that 'such formal settings will constrain their responses'. She goes on to suggest that more informal settings in which children and young people have greater amounts of autonomy such as clubs and playgrounds are often spaces in which they can speak more freely.

I therefore decided to approach youth clubs as a point of access to young people meeting my selection criteria. Following Masson (2004), I decided to first draw upon my own network of personal contacts in order to approach gatekeepers in youth clubs alongside efforts to approach others independently. Like schools, the clubs were selected on the basis of their being situated in working class areas, some of which also suffered from many of the problems associated

with social exclusion (SEU, 1997). After pinpointing gatekeepers at clubs where I did not have personal contacts, I sent emails giving an overview of the project and explaining my interest in carrying out one-to-one interviews with some of the club's young people for around an hour. Emails also explained that the identities of young people and clubs would be treated with the strictest of confidence at all times, and that I currently held a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Whilst often receiving acknowledgements, my efforts to follow up these potential points of access through a lengthy spiral of telephone calls, contact making and detail forwarding led nowhere. However, via my own network I was able to negotiate access to Leyland Youth Club and was given permission to attend its weekly evening sessions in the hope that some of the young people may wish to speak with me.

During my first visit I discussed the project and the logistics of attempting to carry out research at the club and was told that I would be unable to conduct interviews without the presence of a youth worker. Indeed, anyone who plans to work with children and young people must acknowledge the potential risks that some adults can pose (Masson, 2004). Indeed, since the sexual abuse of children was 'discovered' by the media during the mid-1980's, fears about 'stranger danger' have steadily increased in the UK (Kitzinger, 2002) and now firmly underpin codes of conduct and procedure for relationships and spaces where adults work with children and young people. Yet given staff shortages, the busy nature of the centre and its limited working hours, the presence of a youth worker appeared to be neither feasible nor desirable from the point of view of the centre, individual youth workers, or the project itself. Masson (2004: 56) pragmatically suggests that in such instances, 'using large public rooms or corridors allows the interview to be observed but not overheard'. Yet as Coleman *et al* (2004: 232) points out, the problem remains that 'no one is going to talk as openly and freely in a busy social services office, or a noisy youth club, as they are in a quiet room'. However, not wishing to lose the opportunity to generate some data, I was able to gain permission for interviews to take place in a relatively quiet corner of a large reception area which I hoped would offer relative privacy but not require that a youth worker be assigned to observe.

I was also told by staff at the club that attempting to interview its users for around an hour was far too ambitious given the short attention spans of those who attended. This was echoed by later interactions with gatekeepers and the perceived infeasibility of the project initially generated great anxiety on my part. As Tucker (2004) points out, those who work closely with young people often purport to possess exclusive knowledge of their requirements, ambitions and abilities. Whilst I had reviewed the work of other researchers who had successfully

generated data with disadvantaged and marginalised young people, it was nonetheless extremely disconcerting for those who worked with them on a daily basis to warn me about the unlikelihood of my own success.

After several weeks of interacting with young people at the club I was able to arrange an interview with a 16 year old girl who had been formally excluded from school in her final year and had not completed her GCSE's. However, my plans to use a quiet corner of the reception area proved unworkable. Indeed, within two or three minutes a small, inquisitive crowd had gathered to watch and listen to the proceedings. This not only caused embarrassment to the participant, it also compromised the already fragile privacy of the interview, which was terminated immediately. Whilst I had worked hard to conduct myself in an ethical manner, besides implications for the quality of any data generated, I was concerned about the efficacy of an approach in which ever-present threats to privacy not only undermined promises of confidentiality, but also made the research process an uncomfortable and potentially damaging experience for participants. This underpinned the decision to begin attempting to generate a sample of young people via the three schools through which I had accessed education professionals and various branches of Connexions.

#### *- Plan B: Schools & Connexions*

Following such a difficult first attempt at accessing young people through and within more informal settings, I emailed gatekeepers at The Meadows, St Justine's and John Marsh High regarding the possibility of generating samples of young people from their current cohorts of pupils who had just finished their GCSE examinations. In order to minimise the chances of accessing middle class young people, I specified my interest in speaking to pupils from the local area that had not necessarily been expected to obtain 5 GCSE's at A\*-C and for whom education did not necessarily feature in their plans after finishing school. Whilst inviting suggestions on how best to proceed, I also fielded the possibility of sending letters out to pupils inviting them to contact me if interested in participating in the study. Although gatekeepers at St Justine's and John Marsh High both felt unable to help, the deputy head at The Meadows was not only happy to assist, but also gave permission for me to use office space so as to conduct interviews in private over the summer. He explained that around two-thirds of the year group met the selection criteria and wrote a letter of endorsement to parents to accompany my own to young people.

Having previously sought to avoid the formal setting of the school, I reasoned that whilst the process of drawing a sample in such a way might be lengthy, it could be no more so than that which I had already attempted. Moreover, carrying out interviews during the summer break meant that the normal rhythms of schools would be paused and its everyday atmosphere interrupted and transformed. Similarly, young people would not be required to wear school uniform, and by virtue of their having completed their schooling, any sense of obligation they may have been felt regarding their participation may have been minimised. However, I remained concerned that for those whom school had been and possibly remained an unpleasant environment, it may have been difficult or even out of the question for them to have returned and/or to have talked with somebody they perceived as being attached to the school. In this respect, when putting the letter to young people together I was careful to emphasise that no matter what their experiences and/or thoughts and feelings about school, if they were interested in speaking to me then I was interested in hearing what they had to say. In addition, I emphasised that any contributions they made would not be passed on or used by anyone else but me. Letters also suggested that young people could register an interest in the project either by phone/text, email, or by completing and returning a pre-stamped and pre-addressed postcard. Besides supplying all envelopes and stamps, I also personalised and stuffed letters and envelopes under the supervision of the school's administration staff who then retained them for posting. This minimised any additional costs or work for the school whilst also allowing staff to control my access to names and addresses.

However, when I arrived to carry out these tasks it transpired that the most convenient way for the school to have selected a list of pupils and printed their names and addresses was to use an already constructed list of 60 pupils selected for the GCSE mentoring scheme. Within a system based upon survival by results fuelled by the A-C economy, these 60 pupils had been selected by the school for 'educational triage' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) – prioritised for additional support and attention by virtue of their being just below the 5 A\*-C GCSE benchmark. With the deputy head and administration staff already working hard to prepare the school for the summer break, I felt compelled to accept that whilst those deemed unable to benefit from educational triage and thereby excluded from the mentoring scheme would in turn be excluded from the project, I had still reached a good starting point. Receiving a total of 15 responses, 11 interviews were carried out with young people via The Meadows. As with teachers, where young people failed to respond to my second attempts to make contact with them, I took it that silences may have indicated that they had changed their minds regarding their potential participation.

As St Justine's and John Marsh High had been unable to help with a sample of young people, I had also begun emailing various branches of Connexions. Announced in 2000 (DfEE, 2000), Connexions was designed to provide a 'joined up' policy initiative which channelled youth support services into a single point of contact (Connexionswest, 2009). Whilst intended to be a universal service for all 13 to 19 year olds delivered by teams of personal advisors, the bulk of the emphasis is placed on assisting those young people deemed 'at risk' of social exclusion through under-achievement at school or their not being in education, employment or training (NEET) (Coles, 2004). All but one branch responded negatively, and several again suggested that it was unlikely that young people would be interested in speaking to me for so long or even taking part in such a project. Following the one positive response, I was invited to a meeting to discuss how a sample might be arranged. Besides my CRB check, I was also instructed to provide a statement from my supervision team that my project was ethically robust. Enthusiastic about the project, the Connexions coordinator suggested that the best way to proceed would be for personal advisors to identify and approach those who fitted the selection criteria and to then arrange for interviews to take place in one of the branch's interview rooms. In addition, she offered to enlist the help of coordinators at two youth training centres working closely with the branch in order to generate the sample. I was subsequently able to interview 6 young people via these organisations, which brought the number of young people interviewed to 17.

### ***Ethical Considerations & Informed Consent.***

France (2004: 183) points out that one of the problems associated with the difficulties of gaining access to children and young people via gatekeepers is that it can distract researchers from the main task of gaining access and informed consent from children and young people themselves. Gatekeepers are bound by the specific procedural requirements in which they are enmeshed and are in turn surrounded by an awareness of the same sense of 'stranger danger' which informs such procedures (Masson, 2004). In this respect, whilst I was required to complete and produce a CRB check for the gatekeepers I encountered, I also worked hard to be as clear and open as possible about the project and what the participation of young people would involve. However, despite the challenges of gaining access to young people via gatekeepers, as with educational professionals, this was seen as the start of a much longer process in which ethical considerations and challenges came to the fore.



As Robinson & Kellett (2004: 91) point out, for many young people it may be that the various adults in their lives continue to control their ‘use of time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, times of eating – even their mode of social interaction’. Moreover, for those young people from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds, intergenerational power imbalances may be even more pronounced (Ridge, 2002). Coleman *et al* (2004: 233, emphasis added) suggest that following the recognition of unavoidable intergenerational power inequalities, the core concern becomes one of ‘*how* adult power is exercised’. For Masson (2004), this not only requires that researchers remain sensitive to the relative ‘powerlessness’ of children and young people and pressures accompanying this, but that they also conduct ethically robust research in which children and young people can exercise genuine, well informed choices regarding their participation. Indeed, for Robinson & Kellett (2004) this is the hallmark of ethical research with children and young people. At the same time, they suggest that whilst there is often an emphasis upon obtaining informed consent, there has been less attention paid to children and young people’s ‘right to dissent’ (*ibid*: 91). Indeed, like adults, children and young people may find it hard to refuse requests for participation (Alderson, 2004). However, given both intergenerational power imbalances and other intersecting inequalities, it is especially important for researchers to remain alert ‘to cues and to gently check how people feel’ (*ibid*: 107). As Coleman *et al* (2004: 233) put it:

‘the messages we send through our gestures, our body posture, our eye contact and so on all have an impact. Indeed, in situations where adolescents are anxious or uncertain, and where words do not come easily, their non-verbal cues can assume an even greater significance than we realise’.

Besides remaining alert to such cues, I adopted a clear and methodical approach to the processural nature of obtaining informed consent in which I worked from the position that participants were being invited to opt-in rather than out of the project. That is, I always assumed that no matter what young people knew about the project when we finally came to sit down together, they were still yet to take a final decision regarding their participation based on the more detailed information I planned to give them. Rather than this being an opportunity to ‘convince’ them, I worked hard to distance myself from my personal investment in the project and position myself as an ‘advisor’, explaining the project and the implications of involvement in a way which would help young people weigh up the ins and outs of participation. In this respect, I attempted to minimise the extent to which potential participants may have felt that declining to take part in the project may have had any personal impact upon me. However, this

was a delicate balancing act between a ‘disinterested professionalism,’ which attempted to convey the impression that declining to participate in research was perfectly acceptable, usual and without any form of repercussion, and a person with whom young people might feel able to discuss some of the intricacies of their lives.

Whilst explaining what the project was about and what the interview process involved, I also worked hard to make it clear their names and those of places they mentioned would be anonymised and that beyond any adults who had been directly involved in the arrangement of interviews and those people who young people themselves decided to tell, nobody else would be made aware of their involvement and details of the interviews would not be discussed with people who knew them. Finally, I explained that whilst perfectly possible for me to take notes during interviews, where young people gave their permission they were recorded and securely stored before being transcribed and erased. I would also suggest that if they wished to take some time to think about their involvement or discuss things with other people then they should do so. After agreeing to continue (as all did), and before interviews began, I asked participants to sign both a consent form stating that I had explained the research and what their involvement entailed, and a receipt of voucher form for the £15 vouchers I was able to give for their time<sup>19</sup>. As with teachers, I explained that forms would be securely stored and only be referred to if any issues regarding their participation arose. Just before commencing I assured participants that they should feel free to pause or stop the interview at any moment.

### ***Design & Deployment.***

As a qualitative technique, the design and deployment of a biographically orientated interview approach for the generation of data with working class young people shared many parallels with the interviews carried out with education professionals. Indeed, whilst interviews with young people were also approached as flexible processes with a dynamic and rational order which demanded appropriate warm-up, core, and wind-down questions, their semi-structured nature allowed them to take variegated and particular forms whilst also ensuring a degree of coherence within and across interviews. The interview schedule proceeded chronologically through the various reference points and stages of compulsory education such as primary and secondary schooling, transitions between years, periods of testing, subject options, final exams and leaving school. In addition, I began by drawing quick timelines of when and where these reference points and stages had been reached. These not only allowed me to begin flexing young people’s memories, but also to then keep my questioning relevant where educational

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<sup>19</sup> I used ‘Love2Shop’ vouchers which are accepted at over 100 different retail outlets.

careers appeared to have been complex. I also began by generating some data in relation to personal/family background so as to gain a feel for participant's social class background (where they had grown up, lived, what their parent(s)/guardians did and where they had gone to school).<sup>20</sup> I used this initial stage of the interview to give participants a feel of what questions would be like, the ways in which I was encouraging them to speak, and the kind of interviewer I was going to be.

However, there were also aspects of biographically orientated interviews with young people that set them apart from interviews with education professionals. Whilst the 'openness' of such an approach allows each interview to be fleshed out by individual accounts, it also feeds into the validity of biographical methods. Indeed, as Breckner & Rupp (2002: 293) point out, 'openness' is the core lynchpin of such research. That is, despite 'specific researcher-defined problems', interviews should begin and then wander into the various sections and sub-sections of lives with broad, open questions that allow participants to relate topics in an unguided way to their own trajectories and experiences (*ibid*, 294). This gives an opportunity for them to set the tone, draw out relevant themes, categories, patterns and to sketch the shape of their lives and/or its particular threads in a way which limits the extent to which researchers are initially able to control and structure such accounts. Researchers are then able to work within this broad outline in order to generate further layers and levels of data through a process of 'internal narrative questioning' which probes and explores initial responses in greater depth (*ibid*). In this respect, the rationally and chronologically ordered stages of schooling were opened up with general enquiries as to what young people who had attended playgroup or nursery remembered about their time there, or what their time at primary/secondary school had been like. However, as with interviews with education professionals, the fact I had selected the theme of the interview and that my internal narrative questioning sought to explore how working class young people encountered and experienced conditions structured by education policy makes 'it is impossible to separate out their voices and the influence of the researcher' (France, 2004: 177).

Beyond this, the design and deployment of biographically orientated interviews with young people differed from interviews with education professionals because of the intergenerational power inequalities which infused them in different ways. For instance, whilst I had prepared myself for the process of gaining informed consent from young people before interviews

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<sup>20</sup> The occupations of parents/carers ranged from cleaners, refuse collectors, dinner ladies, hauliers, glaziers, supermarket checkout workers, publicans, shop fitters, builders, and secretaries for local building firms, and whilst two participants (had) lived on council estates, the remainder lived in working class neighbourhoods.

began, in attempting to remain sensitive to body language and cues I sometimes got the impression that participants felt my cautiousness to be laboured and excessive given that their physical presence suggested a clear desire to take part. However, where participants appeared nervous, I felt a sense in which they were reassured by the open and low-pressure atmosphere I attempted to generate. On the whole, it was young men who appeared to be most nervous during the early stages of discussions, resonating with Charlesworth's (2000: 137) observation that 'it is a fact often overlooked that working class men are often acutely shy and have extremely low self-esteem'. During the initial stages of interviews I worked hard to try and put young people at ease by exposing them to the tone and texture of the process and my own comportment. Whilst the concentration and reflexivity required was demanding, having previously been warned that my aims were overambitious and unworkable it was rewarding to hear young people open up and speak at length about the twists and turns of their educational careers.

Robinson & Kellett (2004: 84) have pointed out that 'a factor that sustains unequal adult-child power relations is a belief that adults have superior knowledge'. In this respect, between my initial indications that participants were experts in their own lives and working hard to incorporate the details already learned via timelines and earlier responses into my questioning, I attempted to create an atmosphere in which young people felt their knowledge and insights were valued and of interest. In most cases, as interviews progressed, the body language and posture of participants began to change, eye contact became more frequent and lengthy, responses more detailed and theorised, and interjections more regular. Yet within all this, I also paid close attention to the wording of questions and the language I used when probing and exploring participant's responses. Indeed, Alderson (2004: 108) has also pointed out that in carrying out interview work with children and young people it is important to avoid words and questions which might make them 'look foolish'. Whilst on occasions clumsy in attempting to open up responses with deeper probing questions, which required several attempts to rephrase, where participants found questions relevant, they were always able to offer insightful responses once pitched in an appropriate way.

On a similar note, whilst designing the interview schedule in a way which sought to avoid asking too many negative questions, I always approached negative topics and areas with preceding questions which were positively orientated. At the same time, having explored difficult or sensitive areas I would attempt to ease participants back out with lighter and more descriptive questions. However, as Coleman *et al*, (2004: 232) point out, there are many

different kinds and levels of communication and in this sense, discussions relating to sensitive issues are unlikely to be the same as ‘a discussion about the relative merits of two local schools’. In this respect, despite my efforts to remain reflexive, to create a secure and open environment, and to work sensitively and creatively when probing, given the core educational focus of interviews I sometimes felt unable to establish the prerequisite level of trust to explore the influence of sensitive events and experiences which had unfolded in participant’s lives beyond the school gates<sup>21</sup>.

After winding down and signalling the way out of the interview with broad, evaluative and outward looking questions, once the recorder had been switched off I continued the process by thanking participants for coming along to speak to me. In some cases, participants reflected on the interview process, pointing out that interviews had provided opportunities for them to reflect and articulate their educational careers and intersecting influences for the first time. For some, these appeared to be sombre moments during which they were penetrated by the full force of past trajectories and their current and future implications. However, I was always left with the sense that participants felt their involvement to have been positive.

### **Section 3: Analysis.**

As Spencer *et al* (2003: 202) point out, ‘qualitative data are usually voluminous, messy, unwieldy and discursive’. Denscombe (1998) thereby stresses the importance that researchers approach their data systematically from the start. In this respect, although interviews were tape-recorded, I kept a field-diary to which I committed any initial thoughts or ideas about interviews at the first available opportunity after their completion. In turn, Fielding & Thomas (2001: 136) point to the fact that transcribing one’s own interviews ‘has the advantage of familiarising you with the data’. In this respect, where possible, early transcription also allowed me to further develop the thoughts and ideas I had already committed to my field-diary. When all interviews were completed and transcribed, I also experimented with computer software available for the analysis of qualitative data. However, this was later abandoned in favour of a manual analysis which I felt kept me closer to complete transcripts in a way which avoided the risk of working with discursive data in a more disjointed and quantitative fashion.

Mason (1996) suggests that qualitative data analysis involves a cyclical process of comparing and contrasting as researchers try to find order in their data. In this respect, starting firstly with

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<sup>21</sup> Particularly the death of one participant’s father.

data from education professionals, I began with an initial reading of individual transcripts in an attempt to ‘familiarise’ myself with the data. This was repeated several times whilst beginning to move back and forth between my original research questions to develop a broad framework of themes and issues, continuing to additionally refract these where appropriate until I had a strong feel for ‘the diversity of circumstances and characteristics within the data’ (Ritchie *et al*, 2003: 221). I then gathered together the relevant portions of each transcript for each theme or issue into separate Microsoft Word documents, with a great many straddling multiple categories (i.e. setting by ‘ability’ (top/middle/bottom, behaviour, peers), exams (SAT’s, GCSE’s), behaviour, class (explicit/implicit). I could then work within and across each to trace out key dynamics and make key connections. Within this, besides looking for similarity and difference, I also paid close attention to contradictions within and across transcripts (Bryman, 2004). For instance, working closely with the ‘inconsistencies’ of education professionals’ accounts, these went on to form a key facet of my interpretation of their accounts as it became increasingly clear that they could invoke class in different and cross-cutting ways. In this respect, whilst I was concerned to grasp education professionals descriptions and perspectives on the educational structures, processes and relations in which both they and working class pupils were enveloped, in looking for the ‘print of class in areas where it is faintly written’ (Savage, 2003:536-537), I paid close attention to the different ways in which it was called up and deployed. Whilst sometimes explicitly named, it was more regularly mobilised in relation to signifiers such as the ‘professional parent’, through references to the people of particular neighbourhoods, or more covertly through vernaculars that invoked shades of pathology and deficit, normality and abnormality, and/or notions of the Same and Other (Reay, 1998a; Skeggs, 2004; Youdell, 2006). Once attached in these ways to particular people, spaces and/or processes it was possible to continue tracing class ‘indirectly’ in areas where accounts returned to or re-entered/crossed over or corresponded with facets of their accounts which were in this respect ‘dry’ – relatively free of these layers of in/explicit naming and association.

In the broad sense, this analytical approach also underpinned my unpicking of the biographical data generated with young people. However, in attempting to stay attuned to the general flow of individual narratives it was additionally preceded by a compiling of short summaries of each to use as (cross) referential anchor points as I later oscillated between the finer details within and across accounts. Yet beyond this, Bertaux & Kohli (1984) point out that besides being a data collection technique, biographical approaches are also a means of addressing core

sociological questions. Indeed, alongside variation in the kinds of questions asked, there is a corresponding variation in the analysis of biographical data in which:

‘some authors focus on the actors subjective points of view; others see their task as the reconstruction of meaning structures; [and] still others try to discern social relationships of which the actors themselves are not wholly or even partially aware.’ (*ibid*: 218).

Paying attention to all these levels of analysis, I examined working class young people as actors in educational contexts comprised of constellations of ‘opportunities and constraints’ (Breckner & Rupp, 2002: 295). That is, I sought to unpack the ways in which individual educational careers took shape against the objective yet shifting co-ordinates of school structures, processes and relations, and to examine what kind of (linear and/or non-linear) patterns they expressed. For instance, in this respect it became increasingly clear that whilst there was a sense of there being layers of commonality, shared meanings, experiences and contexts within young people’s accounts, within this, individual careers could twist, turn, shift, and be contradictory both at once and over time. However, just as the social embeddedness of actors feeds into the trajectories they tread, it also feeds into the ways in which trajectories are recounted – a process in turn bound to the nature and form of available discourses (*ibid*: Charlesworth, 2000). In this respect, Bertaux & Kohli (1984: 231) have pointed to the fact that biographical accounts ‘express the basic relationship of the narrator to the world’ and thereby reflect both personality *and* social categories. They thereby suggest that ‘working class women who have spent their lives in the traditional housewife role do not tell their stories in the same way than men in elite groups do’. In this respect, when analysing the complexities of working class young people’s accounts I aimed to discern orientations to the social world of schooling which were not necessarily explicitly articulated, drawing in turn upon the stocks of existing research and theoretical work explored in earlier chapters to assist in drawing these shades out, whilst also continually thinking things through in relation to those findings gleaned from education professionals.

### ***Summary.***

This chapter has sought to situate and describe the contours of this study in relation to the broad landscape of literatures already explored. It began by discussing the ontological congruence between strong/hierarchical versions of social exclusion and new understandings of social class in relation to biographical methods. It suggested these qualitative methods were well suited to explorations of the variegated ways in which class and exclusion feed into the

processes and experiences which line the material facts of both. Moreover, with biographies worked out through, within and against particular social contexts and relations, it was also suggested that it is key to gain a feel for the ways in which such contexts and relations are structured. In this respect, it was decided that biographically orientated interviews with working class young people would provide an appropriate way in which to explore the lived and experienced effects of educational processes rooted within the wider education policy regime.

At the same time, it was suggested that semi-structured interviews with teachers and PGCE students offered a suitable way in which to explore the particular ways in which the education policy regime structures the educational spaces which working class pupils encounter. Parallel to this, they were seen as suitable techniques with which to explore the ways working class pupils and the educational and societal processes affecting them are understood by those who are principally trained and charged to teach in an education system intimately bound to the (re)production of class inequalities and social exclusion.

From there the discussion moved on to explore the ways in which a sample of 9 PGCE students and 9 teachers were accessed and subsequently joined by a sample of 3 students support staff. Close attention was paid to the processes of gaining access and informed consent, ethical issues, the design and implementation of interview schedules and the kinds of data they generated. This was followed by an exploration of the ways in which a sample of 17 working class young people was accessed, the accompanying challenges of carrying out research within the context of intergenerational power imbalances, and some of the specific issues related to the design, deployment and status of biographically orientated interviews. In addition, it has also concluded with a discussion of the analytical strategy through which data was examined. From here, we turn from our previous immersion within existing policy, empirical, theoretical and methodological literatures, and use them as interpretive tools with which to move into and make sense of the project's own empirical findings.



# 6

## **The View from Above: Education Professionals.**

### ***Introduction.***

Teachers stand at the cross-roads of education policy and professional practice, home and school, and are thereby both embedded within and form part of the complex dynamics between them. It is the way in which this interplay overlaps and intersects with social class as a node of social inequality re/produced through and within education which forms the basis of this chapter. In this respect, it draws upon the data generated via the study's sample of 21 educational professionals to examine the impact of the current market-based education policy regime upon the institutional structures, processes, and professional practices which confront working class pupils on a daily basis. In turn, it explores the ways in which working class pupils and the societal and educational process which shape their educational experiences and outcomes are understood by those trained and charged to teach in an education system intimately bound to the re/making of class inequalities. Divided into three broad sections, the chapter opens with an exploration of the reasoning behind participants' becoming education professionals and key aspects of their accounts of *Initial Teacher Training* (ITT) in its contemporary form. This is followed by an examination of participants' readings of the medley of forces they saw as steering both the educational spaces and the schooling experiences of working class pupils that unfolded within them. Finally, in the concluding section we move on to explore the ways in which accounts were complicated by readings of working class parents as pathological and deficient.

### **Section 1: Training & Entering.**

#### ***'Making a Difference'.***

For each of the educational professionals that took part in the study there was a particular constellation of factors that brought them to the job. For younger participants this assemblage often included pragmatic issues relating to the financial incentives currently on offer to PGCE students and the long-term benefits of entering a relatively stable profession. As with older teachers, these considerations then merged and mingled with desires to build upon previous experiences of working with children and young people in other contexts, to directly utilise degrees and pass on cherished subject knowledge, and/or to follow parents and grandparents

along established career paths. Yet at the same time, there was also a strong desire to ‘make a difference’ for pupils. For instance, Anthony explained that whilst financial incentives and job security led him to begin a PGCE earlier than he might otherwise have done, making a difference was a key motivating factor in his decision to teach:

*A: ‘it pushed me slightly, yeah, down that avenue slightly sooner than I would normally have chosen, but, underlying, there is certainly a fairly basic desire to want to do the teaching, but yeah, possibly one of the stronger, one of my stronger reasons for going into education initially, from a sort of, I don’t think I want to say social justice, but that sort of, do you know what I am driving at?’*

*W: Yeah.*

*A: That idea that, you know, everyone should be able to theoretically get degrees if they want to, why the hell not?’*

In turn, whilst a sudden epiphany regarding the wider value of a successful business career underpinned Lucy’s decision to move into education, other participants rooted their wish to make a difference in aspects of prior life experience. For instance, both Lee and Carol related their desire to make a difference to encounters with illiteracy after moving into employment and new social circles following university. Yet for Kelly and Anne, the wish to make a difference stemmed from personal experiences of compulsory education that were anchored in social class. Indeed, both had attended struggling schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and had been the first of their families to make it to university. For them, making a difference was about ‘going back’ to inspire other working class children and young people to begin their own journeys of upward social mobility:

*‘I always had it as my dream to go back to Risemoore High and be a bit of a dangerous mind, you know, watched too many Michelle Pfeiffer films<sup>22</sup> but perhaps I could go back and make a difference’ (Anne)*

Indeed, being an inspiring role model was routinely cited as a key mechanism through which participants hoped to make a difference by demonstrating to pupils the possibility and benefits of learning and achievement. Indeed, the idea of ‘making a difference’ appeared to be bound to the notion that things are not as they should/could be, and that teachers could

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<sup>22</sup> A reference to ‘*Dangerous Minds*’, a Hollywood production in which a teacher struggles with both her colleagues and local authority in an effort to use unconventional teaching methods and close teacher-pupil relationships to inspire working class pupils in an ethnically mixed inner-city school.

utilise the promise of education to change the status quo at the level of individual lives. It is the contemporary process of learning how to put these desires into practice to which we now turn our attention.

### ***‘Learning How to Teach’.***

Both the 9 PGCE students and the 5 teachers who had completed PGCE’s consistently described their ITT as an intensely challenging and stressful year of study. With two thirds of the course apportioned to school-based training and a one third university-based component, participants tended to view this as mirroring an approximate distinction between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. Besides specialist subject knowledge, university-based theoretical knowledge was seen as preparing students to be able to plan lessons, set learning objectives, outcomes, and homework; to incorporate Information & Computer Technology (ICT), numeracy and literacy into their lessons; to manage pupil behaviour; and to develop their knowledge of the National Curriculum, assessment, child protection issues, pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and the teaching of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL). In this respect, university-based theoretical knowledge was seen as relating to ‘how to actually teach’:

*‘you basically learned how to teach and the whole time the course leader, who was brilliant, demonstrated to us how she would be in a classroom, so ‘the hand-down three-two-one technique’, she would demonstrate that to us, which was a bit patronising but it got it across you know, this is how to teach. We also had lots of visiting lecturers that were established teachers come and just give us general classroom management techniques’ (Sasha)*

In turn, participants explained that a key aspect of learning how to teach was about ensuring that education was accessible to all. As Jenny put it:

*‘I think the tutors are pretty good at trying to let you become your own type of teacher but in terms of skills and values they kept drumming into us the importance of inclusion and differentiation so that you would be the type of teacher that provides for all kids.’*

Indeed, whilst making education accessible and ‘providing for all’ were seen as an integral part of what learning to teach was about, as Jenny suggests, this was more specifically bound to the intersecting ideas of ‘inclusion’ and ‘differentiation’. With the former presented as the need to cater for children and young people of all abilities, the latter referred to the subsequent process of tailoring and targeting work to different segments of the ability spectrum. As

Anthony explained, combining this with other procedural requirements and techniques formed the backbone of the teaching practice the theoretical component of ITT aimed to cultivate:

*'there's a lot of um, training to do with the specific, um, teaching and learning side of it, so how you approach actual classrooms in an almost isolated sense. Its sort of possibly, maybe more classroom techniques, that sort of thing, so how you would plan for a scheme of work, you know, a unit of work, um, how you would then deliver that, how you would then differentiate the work into at least three different levels so that you have got something that the lower ability kids could reasonably tackle, something that will equally challenge the middle ability kids and higher ability kids, rather than pitching one bit of work at a whole spectrum of abilities.'*

Beyond this it was clear from participants' accounts that their ITT had covered little in relation to educational inequalities and disadvantages besides those associated with pupils with SEN and/or EAL. For instance, whilst the majority recalled having examined gender issues in relation to the notion of 'failing boys', issues relating to the relationship between education, 'race' and ethnicity were covered less frequently. Indeed, as Anthony put it, such matters were 'very complex issues and you really, its one of the areas that gets side-lined a little bit given that it's only a one year course and we spend two thirds of it in school anyway'. In turn, as the following extracts demonstrate, whilst participants considered it to be a salient issue, the relationship between education and social class was almost entirely absent:

*'H: I wish we had had more on it at university because I think it affects it a huge amount and I don't think we covered it enough or in enough detail.'*

*W: Okay, in what kinds of ways were those issues covered then or touched upon?*

*H: Not really touched on at all, not directly' (Hafsa)*

*'That's not really come up. It's a big thing, something that I'm quite interested in myself because of where I come from so, but they've not really touched upon that in all honesty' (Kelly)*

*'Yes, I mean it was difficult. I don't think they really addressed it they just said 'oh it's a problem and a lot of it is a cultural problem due to the area that the children live in that come to the school', and that made me feel quite cross' (Carol)*

The tightening of control over the preparation of teachers during the last three decades has been accompanied by concerns that as *Initial Teacher Education* has shifted to *Initial Teacher Training*, courses have been stripped of critical elements bound to issues of social justice and in turn become much more technically and practically orientated (Furlong, 2005; Mahony & Hextall, 1997; Hill, 2001, 2007). In this respect, for participants who had completed or were currently completing PGCE's, descriptions of 'learning how to teach' as involving an assortment of procedural and technical approaches for isolated classrooms tally with such concerns. In turn, alongside the minimal attention paid to issues relating to gender, ethnicity, and the near total absence of coverage relating to social class, participants' accounts highlight the way in which 'difference' and making education as 'inclusive' as possible for different pupils was understood almost exclusively in terms of 'ability'. However, against the 'theory' based component of ITT, what was regularly described as the 'deep end' of school-based 'practice' was not only the most coveted aspect of their training, but seen to be where learning how to teach really took place. In its broadest sense, this aspect of ITT offered participants immersion within educational contexts, processes, relationships and subsequently, access to all together different layers of knowledge and experience.

## **Section 2: Accounting for 'Failure'**

### ***The Education Policy Regime I: Looking Out.***

Whilst participants reported that PGCE's had given scant consideration to issues relating to education and social class, many explained that where possible, the allocation of school-based practice was organised so as to give students experiences within a range of educational contexts. In this respect, alongside participants who were already practicing teachers, those still in the throws of their ITT were able to share thoughts and experiences of teaching in what were interchangeably described as '(white) working class', 'rough', 'tough' and/or 'inner-city' schools. Again, whilst for some there was a clear desire to 'go back' and/or to 'make a difference' in such schools, as a number of participants explained, the high staff turnover rates in such schools made it likely that first teaching posts were secured within them. As Sasha explained, for her, teaching in a working class school was a valuable yet temporary learning experience:

*'Well the general plan of things was come into a more like working-class school where you're going to learn loads of behavioural techniques for three to five years and then go to a nice school. I went for an interview to a really nice school... all the staff were old, all of them were*

*old, and I think that's the problem the head has, that lots of people come here because you know it's got some problems that you can learn from so teachers tend to stay for three years and then go'*

In accounting for the difficulties and relative 'failures' of working class schools and pupils one of the key lines of participants' analyses related to the interplay between educational choice-making and what Ball and Vincent (1998: 377) describe as 'cold' and 'hot' knowledge. Whilst the former refers to 'official' information relating to a schools performance such as league tables and OfSTED reports, the latter refers to 'unofficial' information relating to rumours and 'gut-feelings' that hinge around an assortment of class-related messages and readings. With different constellations of both aspiration and capitals, working and middle class parents were seen by participants to engage with hot and cold knowledge and the choice-making process in different ways:

*'I don't think people in the Riverside area pay as much attention to league tables as people from Fallway and people from Fallway for the last few years have been sending their kids further afield to like Highfield and like St Thomas. They know how the system works but again, and it sounds snobby, but there are the more educated people in Fallway.'*

Indeed, as Anne's comments suggest, cold knowledge such as league tables were often seen by participants to lie outside the boundaries of what working class parents considered during their choice-making. In addition, whilst dismissing the contemporary relevance of class and instead describing her school as being in an 'area of social deprivation', Linda added that the maintenance of culture through the social bonds of friendship and community were core factors in the choice-making of local parents. Preference for local schools on the basis that parents themselves had attended them was also put forward by Carol and Anthony as further aspects of working class parental choice-making, while Hafsa suggested that cold knowledge could also be difficult for working class parents to decode. Taken together, readings such as these begin to tally with conceptualisations of working class parents as 'local/disconnected choosers'. This kind of choice is seen as pivoting around the 'pragmatic accommodation' of costs (in terms of travel, travel time, safety while travelling, family disruption); the wishes and emotional and social wellbeing of children themselves; the ability to decipher the language of education; and a subsequent narrowing of options to a 'local circuit' of known schools in which relative failures might be a less visible and more shared processes (Gewirtz *et al* 1995, Reay & Ball, 1997; Ball *et al*, 1995). However, Jenny's comments highlight the ways in which

there was also an overlapping tendency for participants to associate choice-making and use of cold knowledge with differential levels of parental care and concern for their children's education:

*'you've got all the parents who think that SATs results and GCSE results are important trying to get their kids into the ones with the good GCSE results and all the ones who don't get good GCSE results get the parents who have the same expectations but you know they don't really have any expectations, they don't really care'*

The fact that data was a great deal thicker in relation to middle class choice-making reflects the way in which it was seen to be a much more active and therefore crucially important process in accounting for the difficulties and relative 'failures' of working class schools and pupils. For instance, Anne's earlier assertion that 'educated people' knew 'how the system works', were more likely to use league tables and to send their children to schools 'further afield' was a reading of middle class choice-making which echoed across accounts. Moreover, whilst a number of participants saw private education as an (economically viable) option for small sections of middle class parents, they were more generally seen as aspiring for places in what were often described as 'better', 'high-achieving', 'nice' and 'leafy-lane' state schools. Whilst Diane, Lucy and Linda pointed to the (economic) ability of some middle class families to physically relocate in an effort to secure their children a place in such schools, their was a tendency for the thrust of their choice-making to be more broadly associated with a more engaged and caring orientation to their children's education:

*'on the whole they tend to be more supportive, more organised parents, um, usually prepared to communicate more with the school, will be chasing up things like homework, making logs if homework isn't set, attending parents evenings that kind of thing so you tend to get, yeah, they will use the school, they work the system, they will make the comments' (Lucy)*

*'W: So what's the intake like here then?*

*S: It's mostly working class really, we don't have quite so many, you know some of our schools nearby would have parents that are much more professional parents and so they would be, but we are getting more of those, since the school has sort of gone back up we do have a larger proportion of parents who are the very interested parents, they do value education, they are very interested in what the school is doing and they question a lot of the things that we do and all the things that you would expect of professional people, that is something that we haven't had in so much detail, so many of them as we've had in the past, there was much more of the*

*parents who couldn't care less, we do have quite a lot now that are much more caring and much more interested in what their children are doing and very supportive' (Sally)*

Lucy's repeated use of the word 'more' in relation to the parents of middle class children silently calls working class parents into being as 'less than'. Indeed, whilst the former are seen as more supportive, organised, communicative/questioning and again, able to 'work the system', Sally expands this inventory by explicitly attributing 'professional parents' with greater levels of care and value for education than a majority of working class parents at her school that 'couldn't care less'. In addition, Sally's references to the growing numbers of professional parents sending their children to her school again draws attention to the ways in which middle class parents were seen to be much more active in their choice-making. In this respect, with a greater level of care and a more active and engaged orientation to their children's schooling, participants saw middle class parents as much less likely to consider working class schools:

*'I know a lot of people in the Hilltop area, a couple of my friends, they've got children that are coming into secondary school and they said they wouldn't send their children here, you know. And they asked me 'would you send your child here?' and I thought that was a really interesting question and I didn't know what to say because I thought well would I actually send my child here?' (Carol, original emphasis)*

Indeed, besides their greater use of cold knowledge, participants also saw the more caring, active and engaged educational orientation of middle class parents as intersecting with hot knowledge in important ways. For example, Lee suggested that there was a great deal of negative 'mythology' surrounding working class schools which was a particularly important factor in middle class avoidance of them. Whilst discussing this in relation to what he saw as the 'myths' surrounding levels of inter-pupil violence at one of his placement schools, the following extract neatly captures the general flavour of the ways in which hot knowledge of working class schools were described by participants:

*'W: And what kind of reputation did it have?*

*S: Rough kids, anyone that couldn't ... Yellowton is very much a grammar school society, if you don't pass the 11-plus you get sent to one of the other schools and this school being slightly outside of Yellowton it was one of the last places you wanted to go to you know, bad education, bad kids, people don't care. Unfortunately those league tables are still really really*



*important to parents in the area, but yes slowly we're getting, it seems to be more and more, through word of mouth more than league tables that the reputation's coming back' (Suzanne)*

With its continuing links to middle class social reproduction, the grammar school and its 11+ entrance exam are here juxtaposed with 'one of the last places you wanted to go', a physically and socially dislocated educational space populated by grammar school/middle class Others – 'rough kids', 'bad kids' and 'people [who] don't care'. Functioning primarily through word of mouth, these aspects of hot knowledge were seen by participants to mingle with both local and national press outputs and cold knowledge to form 'rumour webs' in which the relative fragility of a schools standing in relation to parental choice-making were seen to hang. In addition, several participants suggested that where cold knowledge was weak, school open days were a vital way of challenging negative rumour webs thereby a key means through which schools and teachers sought to survive in the competition for pupils and funding:

*'open days are really big events in schools, I mean I think they spent as much time and effort on the open day as they did on the big production they did this year and the teachers, quite a lot of the teachers really feel the pressure of having to put on the extra bit to get the kids in because at the end of the day if they don't get enough kids in that year then you know they're not going to be able to get as much staff, they're not going to get as much funding' (Eve)*

The quasi-marketisation of education introduced by the 1988 Educational Reform Act was intended to drive-up centrally defined (conservative) standards and hold educational producers (schools/teachers) accountable to consumers (parents) as the former vied for pupils and resources under a new per-capita funding system. The logic of this was that 'good' schools would be popular and able to expand, while 'bad' schools would be unpopular and wither away as rolls and funding fell. The extract above begins to animate this rationale by articulating the importance of open days in selling schools to parents and the subsequent links between pupil rolls, funding and staff. Yet beyond the importance of 'big kind of PR things going on' such as open days, participants saw the cold knowledge of league tables to be the key battleground in the competitive struggle for survival, suggesting that in many ways they had become schools' *raison d'état*:

*'the whole discussion about everything is about "yeah we are here on the tables", um, being on paper an impressive school' (Anthony)*

*'Everything is about that percentage at the end of the day, 5 A\* to Cs including English and Maths but it annoys the hell out of me' (Anne)*

Comments such as these echo findings from Gillborn & Youdell's (2000: 12) ethnographic examination of the pressures generated by educational marketisation in which they point to 'a situation where almost every aspect of school life is re-evaluated for its contribution to the headline statistic of the proportion of pupils attaining five higher-grade GCSE passes (A\*-to-C)'. Moreover, several of those participants who had been in their posts for long enough were able to recount recent episodes in which the urgency of being well attuned to the interaction between league tables and middle class parental choice had been acutely apparent. For example, Lucy recalled great levels of concern that her school might enter a 'snowballing effect' when another opened near-by:

*W: What kind of pupils would you have lost?*

*L: Your middle class pupils. It was a school that was established in a very middle class area, caused house prices to rocket, everybody wanted their child in there. It had no proven track record, but people looked at it and judged it and thought well if they can't with that intake do well then....*

*W: And so when all of that was all going on, what were the kinds of concerns about what was going to happen to this school?*

*L: Well, that the balance of the intake would be skewed so that you wouldn't get the same mixture of children in that you know, as I said to you before, that critical mass, there was danger that critical mass goes down and then it has a snowballing effect.*

As a religious school, in this instance Lucy suggested that faith was able to offset the potential threat of the new school and that both her schools 'critical mass' of 'middle class pupils' and league table performance remained steady. However, whilst this again marks them out as active choice-makers, the potential exodus of a decisive middle class intake is also seen as a catalyst for schools to enter spirals of decline with their remainder of working class students. In turn, Sally described how a combination of vandalism, deteriorating buildings, a reputation for SEN, for taking pupils formally excluded from elsewhere and for being 'generally rough' led to a snowballing effect of falling rolls and funds and a 'long tail towards the low ability and less in your high ability'. Whilst this brought Sally's school close to Special Measures and potential closure, as the following extract suggests, efforts to avoid and tackle the snowballing

effect essentially amounted to a high stakes zero-sum game in which schools were seen to win and lose out to one another in the competition for pupils and funding:

*'we weren't in Special Measures, we were quite close, we managed to not get into that, you know we were very close to that but basically our numbers had gone down so dramatically because we weren't doing very well and other schools around had really started to take off so we were the victims of that' (Sally)*

In a broader sense, zero-sum competitive struggles for league table positions, pupils, funds, and the corresponding potential for intakes to become skewed along the lines of social class begin to resonate with quantitative analyses of national and regional data (Gorard & Fitz, 1998, 2000; Gibson & Asthana, 2000; Noden, 2000, 2001). Such research suggests that educational marketisation nurtures processes of class-based social segregation and polarisation between schools. In turn, participants' readings and depictions of middle class parents also begin to tally with research exploring the class-based nature of parental choice-making that produces this broad picture (Gewirtz *et al* 1995; Ball *et al*, 1996). In contrast to working class 'local/disconnected choosers', this work describes middle class parents as 'privileged/skilled choosers'. Able to deploy a superior stock of economic, social, and cultural capital than their working class counterparts, middle class parents are seen to be much more able to decode and 'work the system' in seeking out places for their children in well resourced, high performing schools. In turn, the same work points to the ways in which class related currents of hot knowledge play an important role in their avoidance of local working class schools and the subsequent narrowing of options to a 'cosmopolitan circuit' of middle class schools.

However, participants' accounts of middle class choice-making explored above deviate from this picture through an additional emphasis upon the importance of the relative levels of concern parents have for their children's education. Indeed, whilst there were a scattering of references to the importance of economic capital, and cultural capital in the form of confidence, systemic knowledge and educational skills, with the exception of Anne, Carol, Lee and Lucy, participants' analyses circled around an active and engaged concern for their children's education as the distinguishing driver of middle class choice-making. In this respect, it was often constructed as being less a matter of possessing/embodying relevant constellations of prerequisite capitals for the fulfilment of educational aspirations and more a matter of possessing/embodying the right kind of attitude. Whilst research by both Reay (1998b) and Gillies (2005b; 2007) has found working class parents to be as concerned for the education of

their children as their middle class counterparts, recent research by Dunne & Gazeley (2008) flagged up a tendency for the teachers in their study to see working class home-life and parenting as pathological and deficient in relation to education. In this respect, the majority of participant's accounts ran counter to the former and tallied with the latter, with the pathology of working class parents sketched primarily through a silent presence as 'others' to the middle class parents who took centre stage. Within this, participants consistently saw the net actions of middle class parental care as animating the links between league tables, the number and nature of pupil intakes, and funding in ways that locked schools and teachers into a competitive system of survival by results in which league tables had become schools' *raison d'être*. Moreover, the decisive importance of middle-class parental choice-making subtly imbued accounts with a sense that both middle class parents and their children were of greater 'value' and 'worth' given the ways in which the threat/reality of intakes 'skewed' towards 'low-ability' working class pupils were at the crux of the 'snowballing effect'. Whilst this formed the broad external context of accounts of the relative difficulties and 'failures' associated with working class schools and pupils, the implications permeated deep into schools' internal dynamics. Indeed, we now move on to explore how jockeying for position within the logic of the education policy regime often encouraged schools to respond and develop strategies and innovations for improvement which had a complex and particular set of implications for working class pupils.

### ***The Education Policy Regime II: Looking In.***

#### ***- Predictive Data.***

Lubricating efforts to improve results and league table positions were an array of data and performance indicators that related to individual and groups of pupils and accompanied them throughout their schooling careers. Whilst Pamela suggested that such data had proliferated to the point at which 'you've got it coming out of your ear', alongside primary school and year 9 SAT's results, it was Fisher Family Trust (FFT) and Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) scores which participants discussed most frequently. Whereas the former drew upon a wide variety of data relating to pupils' social and educational background such as area of residence, levels of parental education, eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM), and primary SAT's results, the latter was described as an amalgam of literacy, maths and IQ tests administered shortly after students began at secondary school. In turn, participants explained that this and other data was instantly accessible and shared via software such as SIM'S (Schools Information Management System):

*'SIM'S is what a lot of schools use nowadays and it's what they do all their registers on but it's also got all the children's information on it, if they've got any particular ethnic background, you know anything in particular, especially educational needs, it will have their action plans on there, you've got all their marks and their FFT grades, absences, everything's on there, you can find out everything' (Kelly)*

Whilst the collection and accessibility of such data allowed for close planning and monitoring of performance targets, the following extract gives a flavour of the ways in which participants explained schools' use of such data primarily for their predictive qualities:

*'the CAT's, obviously like Fisher Family Trust, it does predict what they would get in year 9 SAT's and what they could get at GCSE. It's quite savage actually in a way, in some ways you look at it and think if I was a parent reading that you'd think what on earth because if they're level 2 when they're coming in, and they would base it on that, obviously the score that they got on that CAT test it's quite daunting so you know you're only going to get Fs and Gs so I think you have to be very careful about releasing that to parents because it's very negative' (Linda)*

Capable of foretelling what beginning secondary school pupils 'would get' after three years (year 9 SAT's) and 'could get' after five (year 11 GCSE's), the 'savage', 'daunting' and 'negative' fact that some children will be predicted to fail from the outset is here cast as an educational practice best done discreetly lest it be perceived from without as an unearthly one ('what on earth'). As part of their ethnographic examination of the pressures generated by educational marketisation, Gillborn & Youdell (2000: 212, emphasis removed) have described a pervasive 'new IQism' in which 'hereditarian assumptions (and all the concomitant inequalities of opportunity that they produce and legitimate) are coded and enacted through the discourse of 'ability''. Whilst pointing out that the fact that tests of ability can be prepared for 'should rationally destroy any belief that they measure innate potential', like older and discredited motions of intelligence, ability was seen to be 'fixed, generalised and measureable potential' (*ibid*: 65). However, whilst a similar discourse of ability was central to participants' accounts – and central the official language of 'inclusion' and 'differentiation' embedded within ITT courses - they nonetheless displayed a degree of ambivalence regarding the validity of data relating to ability. For instance, the following extract captures the way in which participants often expressed a degree of unease that the power of predictive data could lay in its effects:

*'I have concerns about that because I actually sit with a colleague who lives in an area of deprivation whose child is the youngest in the year and various other things and you say well, according to that he's written off already and not saying, hummm, actually, with a little bit of encouragement and effort, that child could get an A, not just for the sake of getting an A but actually to, you know, challenge them and push them and I think that we have lost sight of that. I think what we are doing is a bit of a Fordist production line and I think that we have just lost sight of the individual child sometimes' (Lucy)*

Indeed, participants often cited late educational development, puberty, and the development of sexuality as critical 'human factors' that could frustrate predictive data in either direction. Implicit within Lucy's reference to the Fordist production line is the suggestion that the reduction and processing of pupils according to an inflexible and standardised numerical form loses sight of the role of such individual 'human factors' in educational achievement. In this respect, her concern is that the potential for pupils to succeed - and encouragement from teachers for them to do so - is limited by the coalescence of variables which otherwise see pupils 'written off'. In turn, this keyed into a regularly expressed sentiment that predictive data permeated deep into the practice of teaching and placed powerful limits upon pupils' own efforts and expectations:

*'I felt like I was teaching kids to get a grade, I found it actually very de-motivating because kids who were aiming for an E, once they hit the E grade boundary for the lesson they just stopped and you just couldn't get them to work because they didn't want to, oh well I'm meant to get an E so that's it' (Kelly)*

Participants' unease about the power of predictive data echoes Gillborn & Youdell's (2000: 212, original emphasis) suggestion that whilst teachers may not 'consciously accept' the hereditarian position', they nonetheless 'behave as if they do'. In this respect, both Lucy and Kelly's acknowledgment of the power of predictive data to function as a brake on both teachers' and pupils' expectations of academic ability are simultaneously accounts of the ways in which *they do so* by encouraging and reinforcing notions of ability as measurable, innate, and fixed.

However, both through and within this it is important to recognise that whilst the bulk of participants had or were undergoing training which stressed a technical and procedural approach to teaching and largely eschewed systemic analysis, their experiential immersion

within schools – their socialisation and acculturation – appeared to leave little difference between accounts in terms of the development and levelling of criticism at the way in which predictive data and league tables hung together. For instance, whilst several participants stressed the need to prioritise Value Added<sup>23</sup> within performance data as a way of calming the extent of polarisation between schools and the connected threats/realities of the ‘snowballing effect’, most wished to abolish league tables, resonating with Jenny’s assertion that this ‘would change pupils perceptions of education and... free up teachers to concentrate more on pupils’ development rather than passing tests’. Indeed, whilst for Linda the current problem was that ‘you are actually very condensed into teaching towards this exam all the time and not having the opportunity to go off at a tangent to do other things’, Sally explained that:

*‘you feel like you’re nagging... and it would be lovely sometimes if there wasn’t all that pressure for performance all the time so that you could have a slightly different relationship with them... as a human being rather than a robot’ (Sally)*

Within these accounts we begin to see not only the ways in which predictive data forms a key building block for how pupils are thought about within schools, but the ways in which this marries up with earlier descriptions of difference and inclusivity as tightly relating to notions of ‘ability’ within ITT. What comes to the fore is the contradiction between the immediate reduction of pupils to numerical measures so as to closely monitor and manage teaching and learning for enhanced league table performance, and the subsequent ways in which this not only narrows the content, purposes, and relations of schooling, but determines, ‘writes off’, and shrivels pupils’ own expectations. Whilst this in turn highlights the way in which both the practical school-based component of ITT and ongoing professional experience meant that participants were attuned to educational contradictions, it is a subtle yet crucial point to note that their concerns and frustrations emerge primarily as descriptions that follow in the wake of what they see *as happening*. In this respect, both through and within their accounts participants also begin to surface as consciously yet reluctantly hemmed in by and inextricably involved in the momentum of what happens.

#### *- Setting: Structures of Ability & Behaviour.*

As part of schools’ strategies to improve league table performance, participants explained that one of the first and most fundamental uses of predictive data was to assign pupils to different

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<sup>23</sup> A measure of any difference a school makes to the predicted GCSE results of its pupils when they enrol five years earlier. This was seen to capture the true value and effectiveness of teachers’ work in a way which was missed by simple comparisons of final results.

sets. Whilst some described how setting took place after the first term of the first year when CAT scores became available, others explained how pupils were given additional time to settle into their secondary schooling before being set at the start of their second year. Although the rationale for setting was that it provided a way of closely matching teaching to ability and thereby allowed 'people to achieve at the right level', Linda explained that it was also because 'it takes a very skilled teacher if you've got a mixed ability class with a high range of low ability and shall we say shining students to pick where you pitch that lesson'. However, participants routinely suggested that whilst not a totally cut and dried division, there was a general tendency for sets to be stratified along the lines of social class:

*'a lot of the Hilltop type pupils will be the ones who are in the top sets, parents probably have got jobs like I know the parents have got jobs like being a teacher or doctor, lawyers, things that are professional and then at the other end of the scale you see it all at parents evening, do you know what I mean? Dads that come in that have got their painter/decorator stuff on and they'll come in or parents that are quite clearly using crack or heroin, which you can see, or you know are the kids in the bottom sets unfortunately and there is a clear trend' (Carol)*

*'the bottom set kids, if anyone does, have trouble at home, one or two unemployed parents, lots of apathy and a long back-history of resistance to education and so on, and I think that they would have a whole bunch of stuff kind of set up against them. Whereas clearly, the top set kids have um, kids who have private instrumental tuition and so on and it sort of tells you slightly about the parents that they see fit to pay for their child, it's a strong correlation between people who take up instrumental tuition and how they then do. Just because of attitude really' (Anthony)*

Here Carol describes what she sees as a 'clear trend' in associations between middle class area of residence (Hilltop type pupils), professional parents and being in top sets, and a corresponding association between bottom sets and manual parental occupations/social problems. In turn, Anthony engages with a more implicit yet morally loaded language of class, tracing associations between setting, parental attitude and educational orientation. Indeed, besides a troubled home-life marked by unemployment, whilst bottom set pupils are seen as also having to contend with heralding from lines of people who have never wanted education, the 'strong correlation' between success and top set pupils is marked by the positive attitudinal lineage of parents who 'see fit' to pay for private instrumental tuition. At one level, the long legacy of correspondence between social class and the practice of dividing and schooling pupils by ability within single institutions renders the tendency for sets to be stratified along



class lines unsurprising (Simons, 1953; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981; Boaler, 1997; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). However, when considered in relation to the wider thrust of their accounts, the significance of such observations lies in the fact that whilst participants pointed to explicit/implicit social class based distinctions between sets when prompted, their default use of the language of hierarchical sets/levels of academic ability to distinguish between pupils meant that by their own observations they were at one and the same time talking about pupils from different social classes. For instance, middle class top set pupils were ‘high ability’, ‘high end’, ‘able’, ‘better’, ‘intelligent’, ‘clever’, ‘academic’, ‘shining’, ‘gifted and talented’, while working class bottom set pupils were ‘low ability’, ‘low end’, ‘worst’, ‘not very bright’ and ‘non-academic’. In turn, whilst Sasha described top and bottom sets as being ‘completely different, worlds apart’, the following extract neatly captures the way in which participants saw setting as having a different impact for those in different sets:

*‘I think that tiering people, it sort of exaggerates the learning outcomes and so, the better kinds can kind of egg each other on and it can become sort of a real learning utopia but the worst kids its just, its just dangerous’ (Anthony)*

Indeed, although setting was seen to be about matching teaching to ability for the maximisation of achievement, as participants’ accounts unfolded they qualified the benefits and effectiveness of setting as being concentrated within higher sets. In addition, they suggested that as distinct environments, maintaining the boundaries of higher sets - and top sets in particular – was a key aspect of their effectiveness. For example, beyond Linda’s concerns that setting created friendship divisions between pupils, she suggested that ‘you have to be fair to the children who are gifted and talented’. This was a routinely expressed sense of fairness for top set pupils that hinged upon their separation from pupils from lower sets and was in turn described by Anne as an exercise in ‘containment’. Moreover, whilst the level and pace of higher sets were seen to render them inaccessible to pupils from lower sets, it was more often the possibility that lower set pupils might hinder that momentum – especially through misbehaviour – which made their separation so crucial. In this respect, top sets were seen to be spaces in which pupils wanted to do well, with aspirations to follow academic routes through A-levels to university and then on to professional jobs. In turn, participants described top sets as having few behavioural issues, with Hafsa explaining that ‘the able ones tend to question less, you know, why are we doing this, because they can see the logic behind getting more qualifications’. However, it was also clear from participants’ accounts that there was a particular kind of teacher-pupil relationship within top sets:

*'no-one would bat an eyelid if someone came across and slapped someone across the face [in a bottom set], it would be like 'oh' and carry on with their work. If that happened in my top set I'd go mad and the person would probably, it's like double standards but, yeah.'* (Sasha)

*'In the top set it's the attitude you go in with, with the top set I'm kind of, I shouldn't do this but I expect them that they're going to be quiet when I want them to be and I forget that with my lower set I'm expecting them to be noisy so I plan for that but with my top set I forget to plan for that so I plan kind of like, I need to push through this because you need to get the grades'* (Kelly)

*'I mean in my bottom or middle sets I never talk about what set they are. In my top set I'm always saying, yes I think almost every lesson this is top set, this is your expectation or you're doing A level work now you know it's very much driven towards up'* (Carol)

Whilst Sasha describes her relative expectations and reactions to misbehaviour across sets as 'double standards', Kelly frames this as an 'attitude you go in with' and similarly confesses differential levels of planning for both disruption and grades across sets as something 'I shouldn't do'. However, her suggestion that the need to push and ensure progress in top sets 'because you need to get grades' implicitly cites a greater need to secure results for top set pupils than those in lower sets. In turn, Carol contrasts her silence in relation to academic levels in lower sets with the constant and explicit driving-up of expectations within top sets by flattering pupils about their ability to tackle A-level work. In this sense, whilst several participants suggested that pressures to maintain performance in top sets left some pupils feeling insecure, they were more routinely seen to be confident and self-assured with a tendency for this to grow into arrogance. Indeed, participants routinely suggested that setting cultivated a particular sense of self amongst pupils of different sets:

*'I think they get set at age 7 for maths and I should imagine that when you've been in the bottom set since age 7 and you're getting to age 16 and you've been in the bottom set for 10 years you're thinking I'm not going to get a C grade and there's all this emphasis on C grade when really I think there should be a kind of, it should be seen as a good thing to even get an E grade, do you know what I mean, to some people that is a big achievement but in the league tables it's all about A\* to C isn't it?'* (Jenny)

There was a regular emphasis placed on the sorting of pupils by ability and their corresponding awareness of themselves in such terms as a lengthily process beginning early on in their schooling careers. In this respect, whether becoming aware of their ‘labels’ through seating arrangements at primary school; their ‘compartmentalisation’ by ‘constant assessment’ and subsequent target setting; or via a recognition of their failure to measure up to the all important A\*-C yardstick valorised by league tables, in comparison to top set pupils, middle and lower set pupils were seen to develop a correspondingly fragile sense of themselves in relation to both ability and education.

Indeed, making pupils aware of their abilities through ‘constant assessment’ was seen by participants to play an interconnected monitoring role for both pupils and teachers. Whilst for pupils it was seen as a way of encouraging them to think about/engage with their own development and thereby take greater responsibility for their own learning, for teachers it safeguarded against the solidification of sets and ensured the close match between teaching and ability by allowing movement between sets according to performance. Moreover, a number of participants cited the importance of stressing this to be an individual or ‘personalised’ process in order to offset its potential to feed into pupils’ relative hierarchical judgements of themselves and others. However, whilst movement between sets was primarily discussed in relation to ability and behaviour, as Eve explained, the downward setting of middle set pupils she taught during an ITT placement was closely intersected by social class:

*‘before Christmas there were about 8 people who went down and I think they were probably the people who, yes, weren’t as rich, who didn’t come in with the flashiest clothes, I know for a fact that one of their dads worked in a supermarket. I think that’s just me being judgemental though’.*

In their examination of the ways in which class featured within teachers’ understandings of pupils’ achievements, Dunne & Gazeley (2008) found that it was rarely acknowledged and sometimes openly denied. For Sayer (2005: 1), such reactions stem from the fact that the arbitrary nature of ‘natal class’ and its subsequent bearing upon the lives that follow render social class an ‘embarrassing and unsettling subject’. In this respect, whilst Eve’s descriptions once again resonate with decades of research describing the overrepresentation of working class pupils in lower sets, implicit within her final dismissal of these observations is the message that it would be wrong for social class to have a bearing on pupils’ schooling. At the same time however, this recognition of the arbitrary and unjust nature of class is

simultaneously a pulling back from it. In finally pointing to the inaccuracy of her judgement, Eve jettisons the social class-based dimension of educational processes, leaving the principles/discourses of individual and personal merit and ability intact. In a connected way, rather than encouraging greater responsibility for their own learning and offsetting negative comparisons with others, for lower set pupils in particular, the cumulative impact of 'personalised' processes of testing, setting, and the omnipresence of the A\*-C economy was consistently seen by participants to work against the development of strong and positively orientated learning identities:

*'I've got a group of year 8 bottom set children who are really sort of naughty kids, very sort of acting out in class for all sorts of reasons but when you look at them it's usually because they've judged themselves to be lower in the pecking order' (Linda)*

Both Simons (1953) and Nash (1971: 248) have commented on the ineffectiveness of attempts to disguise processes relating to the sorting and ranking pupils, with the latter concluding that 'whatever else children may learn or fail to learn in school, they learn... to measure themselves against their classmates', and that in this respect, 'schools teach hierarchical levels of personal worth more successfully than anything else' (*ibid*). Whilst Linda positions this process as central to pupils' misbehaviour, in addition, participants frequently saw the poor behaviour of lower set pupils as feeding into the development of identities that made them 'too cool to learn' or the deliberate provocation of confrontations with teachers to avoid 'embarrassing' exposure of their 'inabilities'. As Sally explained:

*'I think it's a safety mechanism, do you know what I mean, 'I'm not going to achieve much so I'm going to be cool instead', its an alternative, it's a defence mechanism, a way of coping with not doing so well. I think that and the class clown and that sort of thing, that's masking insecurity in their ability and their self-esteem'.*

As key building blocks for thinking about pupils, these accounts begin to highlight how predictive data forms an important underpinning for the ways in which pupils are processed. At one level, unlike league tables and their connected regimes of testing and performance targets, setting was absent from the inventory of things participants wished to see changed or abolished. However, this general acceptance of setting does not steer them away from discussing it in relation to the crux of a contradiction between efforts to closely match teaching to ability for the maximisation of pupils' achievement/league table performance, and the ways

in which the benefits of setting are seen to be concentrated at the top of the hierarchy. In conjunction with testing and the omnipotence of the A-C economy, for those further down the scholastic order setting emerges as a practice implicated in the generation of fragile learning identities/orientations to school/schoolwork marked by poor behaviour and lack of confidence. At the same time, intersecting glimpses of the ways in which participants hold varying expectations/attitudes towards different sets not only echo's a similar set of dynamics described earlier in relation to predictive data, but reiterates that descriptions of the processural impact of setting are at one and the same time accounts of the ways in which participants are embedded within and form part of what happens in schools. Yet beyond this, the fact that the *generative influence* of setting upon behaviour was not traced through to accounts of the ways in which behaviour combined with ability to *determine assignment to sets* begins to highlight the way in which ability formed the dominant logic. In the final instance, this is powerfully demonstrated in the ways in which social class had an awkward and largely silent presence as a blank, matter-of-fact correlation to the scholastic order and its effects that was neatly and comfortably subsumed by and within the synergistic language of setting and ability.

- *Teaching & Curriculum.*

Whilst behaviour was seen by participants to be a major issue for schools and lower sets in particular, alongside the way in which pupils were processed in terms of testing and setting, both Senior Management Team's (SMT's) and teachers themselves were cited as additional drivers of poor behaviour. Despite sympathy for SMT's concerning the systemic pressures to which participants saw them as being ultimately accountable, many expressed frustration at what they saw to be an inadequate approach to poor behaviour. However, participants were clear that they also saw poor behaviour as a 'response to boredom' which was in turn seen to be the product of 'poor teaching' and/or a connected result of their failure to adequately explain work to pupils. In this respect, issues with the mechanics of teaching were routinely cited as the key cause of boredom and problematic behaviour:

*'Kids misbehave when they're bored, when they're not challenged or when they can't do something so a teacher is perfectly capable of managing behaviour if they've got enough pace in their lesson to keep it moving so the kids don't get time to get bored, they've got enough challenge that it's not something they can do standing on their heads without thinking about and they have had the work explained to them properly in 15 different ways, if that's what it takes, then you won't get bad behaviour in a lesson' (Anne)*

Earlier we saw how making learning accessible and inclusive through the differentiation of work by ability was seen to be a central component of the contemporary process of learning how to teach. However, whilst most participants in the throws of their ITT and those who had recently trained cited behaviour management as being a big challenge for them, only Kelly and Suzanne suggested that inclusion and differentiation was something they struggled with. In this respect, whilst participants subtly attached this critique to ‘other’ teachers and very rarely turned the spotlight on themselves, the tight coupling of behavioural issues to technical weaknesses in how to teach left little room for questions relating to the content of teaching. Indeed, whilst Suzanne and Pamela were alone in citing ‘the inaccessibility of some of the things that we try to teach’ as a key cause of boredom and problem behaviour, curricula issues were predominantly raised in relation to the idea that ‘non-academic’, lower set pupils not expected to succeed in the A\*-C economy would benefit from a more vocationalised form of secondary education.

Indeed, in their ethnographic study of the impact of educational marketisation, Gillborn & Youdell (2000; Gillborn, 2001: 108) found that a key way in which schools can attempt to better their league table positions is by operating a system of educational triage in which extra resources are targeted at those pupils’ whose GCSE grades might be boosted into the all important A\*-C range, and thus ‘show the maximum return for their receipt’. In turn, participants referred to this key process as ‘intervention’, citing exam revision sessions/days, one-to-one coaching and mentoring, half-term holiday revision weeks and, in the case of one school, revision weekends away as key components. In addition, whilst the majority of PGCE students described a tendency for them to be ‘kept away’ from GCSE level pupils so as not to endanger the latter’s progress, both Linda and Miriam suggested that there was a corresponding tendency for the most experienced teachers to be reserved for interventions. Moreover, many participants made it clear that much of the intervention process depended upon them putting in additional hours and days beyond the normal school/term timetable. In this respect, besides giving accounts of the ways in which intervention essentially hinged around the allocation of limited resources (primarily teachers’ time and energy), participants were often quick to point to the subsequent inequity for those deemed unlikely to secure entry into the A\*-C economy:

*‘we had too many coming in when we offered revision to everybody, now they’ve just picked the kids on the C/D borderline, Tara had to do it, I mean she came with a list and everybody who was off target we had to sit down and say right, him, has he got any chance of getting a C, no, we’re not going to send him a letter then which is harsh because an Es better than an F*

*surely and a D's better than an E but if he wasn't going to get that C we couldn't because that was what the school was marked on' (Miriam)*

Giving a clear indication of the ways in which the relationship between limited resources and 'what the school was marked on' tightly dictate the sorting of pupils for intervention, Miriam's comments also highlight the arbitrariness of eligibility to improve and the depreciative impact of the A\*-C economy upon lesser grades. Yet at the same time, intervention was also regularly positioned as an appropriate and pragmatic reply to the omnipotence of the A\*-C 'benchmark':

*'it is a benchmark and for some children if you can get them over that particular step, and I think that its all, well, once you, it gives them the possibility of the next stage, so it may give them the choice of doing A levels or a particular course so I think it is quite important that you secure something for those children, I don't think that if it wasn't there, some of these children wouldn't be getting the grades that they are' (Lucy)*

Ball (1998) has described the way in which the marketisation of education has created a new moral environment in which professional judgements are forced up against the incentives, rewards, pressures and punishments of the zero-sum game. Acknowledging the inevitability of these circumstances, Lucy explicitly sets out a logic in which salvaging those pupils just below the A\*-C threshold and securing them the 'possibility of the next stage' is seen as an important professional duty. In this respect, despite frustration about the severance of those pupils below the threshold, the limited and narrow distribution of opportunities to improve through intervention simultaneously gains legitimacy. However, this was also reinforced by the fact that alongside intervention for pupils on the C/D borderline of GCSE attainment, participants described the introduction of an alternative system of diplomas 'for low-attaining pupils' as an additional way in which schools sought to boost their league table performance:

*'I mean the major thing that's come in is that we've changed over to diplomas and much more vocational courses and things that will grab them, and well, we're hoping that the diplomas will actually get us back on track because basically one diploma is equivalent to four GCSEs at C level so already you've met your target, you know. (Sally)*

Yet beyond the instrumental significance of diplomas for league tables, there was a regularly expressed sentiment that those pupils not expected to make it into the academically orientated A\*-C economy were well-suited to a more vocationalised form of education:

*'I don't think it's right to push them along the academic route. I think the diplomas in the ideal situation are very good because ideally they'd be a lot more practical and better aimed at people who aren't academic and more practical or better at construction or perhaps that sort of thing' (Hafsa)*

Such comments sit awkwardly with both the unease participants' expressed about the inequity of intervention, and the simple fact that boosting borderline pupils into the A\*-C range via targeted intervention directly undermines and challenges the fixity of ability. Indeed, this facet of accounts often surfaced as a taken-for-granted, commonsensical, and matter-of-factual ontology of ability in which there were 'people who aren't academic' for whom 'practically' orientated vocations such as 'construction... [and]that sort of thing' were ideal. As Ainley (1988: 143) points out, in societies already marked by rigid class-based inequalities, the development of vocational streams of schooling bolsters 'the role of schools in selecting and allocating labour to unequal positions in the work force'. In this instance, an academic/non-academic typology of pupils not only mirrors the mental/manual division of labour and socio-economic status into which A\*-C GCSE's/vocational qualifications potentially feed, but also subtly casts this order as meritocratic, natural and just.

Yet, alongside the importance attached to the mechanics of teaching, participants often saw themselves as 'fighting with them [pupils], you're fighting really to try and boost their confidence'. In this respect, participants regularly described their involvement in precarious efforts to counter not only the impact of setting and failures to reach coveted test/exam thresholds, but the repercussions of pupils' negative relationships with other teachers. As Pamela explained:

*'they are very quickly wounded. I think they take a lot of effort to build them up, especially if they are vulnerable, and it takes nothing to knock them down'.*

Indeed participants often stressed the huge difficulty involved in raising the confidence of lower set pupils along with the relative ease with which gains could be undone, causing them to 'close up again' or 'fall back into old patterns'. In doing so, the individual and collective relationships teachers were able to foster with lower set pupils were also brought to the fore. Indeed, whereas participants suggested that relationships with top set pupils tended to hinge around the necessity for comprehensive progress through curricula, for lower sets this was



routinely placed alongside the need to develop and maintain relationships which brought pupils 'on-side'. As a means by which frictions between teachers and individuals/groups were tempered and mutual understandings and boundaries were established, bringing pupils 'on-side' was seen as central to the minimisation of disruption and the ability to make relative progress with the mechanics of teaching. Within this, participants stressed the importance of different approaches such as learning and using pupils' names; consistent enforcement of rules; getting to know pupils as people; with Tamzin also adding that pupils had a 'good sense of when they're liked and when they're disliked' by teachers.

These strands of data add further layers of complexity and contradiction to participants accounts. Indeed, whilst earlier descriptions of the ways in which behaviour combined with ability to determine assignment to sets were not circularly acknowledged/tied to accounts of setting's generative influence upon behaviour, descriptions of misbehaviour as a response to boredom caused by problems with the mechanics of teaching similarly leaves these facets of pedagogy disconnected from their wider processual implications in terms of setting. Moreover, beyond a tendency to discuss these aspects of teaching in abstract terms relating to 'other' teachers practice, the reduction of boredom-come-misbehaviour to technical/procedural weaknesses not only rejoins with earlier descriptions of the approach to teaching embedded within ITT, but also sits alongside a widespread absence of questions relating to curriculum other than in terms of divisions between academic and vocational pathways. Through and within this, accounts of the dynamics of 'intervention' follow on from earlier concerns about the power of predictive data as a central building block for thinking about and processing pupils from their earliest moments, forcefully and decisively reasserting itself at end of their schooling to narrowly distribute opportunities to improve in line with the zero-sum logic of survival by results. However, it is amongst these concerns that a further set of tensions emerges from accounts. Indeed, whilst the questionable efficacy of intervention co-exists with a virtuous rationale for salvaging at least some pupils, the imperative to perform is bound up with the deepening of an academic/vocational curricular divide that is both rooted within and further lends itself to thinking about and processing pupils in terms of ability/pupil typology, and thereby cuts straight past the fact that the effectiveness of intervention nullifies such hereditarian notions. Yet at the same time, whilst accounts of efforts to 'fight' against, offset and counter the fragile learning identities wrought from experience of school structures, processes and relations backs away from such reasoning, participants stressed this to be a difficult and precarious endeavour, with relationships with such pupils more routinely about getting them 'on-side' so as to be able to make headway in lessons.

### Section 3: Working Class Parents.

#### **‘What it boils down to’.**

Time and again whilst exploring issues relating to the educational experiences and outcomes of working class pupils participants turned to parents in order to give their accounts greater explanatory power. In turn, these threads of data often contradicted or trumped their accounts of within school structures and processes, circling around a core notion that working class parenting and family life were fundamentally at odds with the possibility of educational success. As Anthony explained:

*If one school is presenting one set of standards and expectations and your home life, your parents and your carers are presenting another set of expectations, um, and they don't quite mesh together, then there is a, there is a friction then which is probably quite overwhelming which can lead to all sorts of, all sorts of problems in the classroom ... I think that some kids are set up to be, to be basically on board with the idea of learning. Generally, there parents have at least A levels, um, other kids aren't at all and its, there's such a strong correlation between, between classroom success and parenting and parental success as well that its, you know, you cant really avoid the blinding, um, idea that obviously one kid is going to basically turn out like there parents are (Anthony)*

Despite being an almost Bourdieuan description of a mismatch between the middle class field of education and working class habitus that fuel powerful processes of social reproduction, the causes of ‘problems in the classroom’ are here tied to ‘home life’ and ‘parenting’ which fails to pass on the ‘standards and expectations’ needed to avoid the ‘blinding’ and ‘obvious’ fact that children ‘basically turn out like their parents’. Indeed, rather than the arbitrariness of the middle class field and the socio-economic and political power relations which sustain it, it was the deficiency of working class parenting which was stressed by participants:

*‘I mean this is what it boils down to at the end of the day, like I went home to a family which my parents sat down and did my homework with them, they worked with me and took me on day trips and I never was allowed to just to go out and say I'm off out, I had to tell them where I was going and so I had a lot of support at home and was encouraged to go to lots of clubs and Brownies and Guides and dancing and all sorts, I did something every night of the week and if not my mum and dad were there whereas if kids don't have that sort of support at home it doesn't matter what you do at school at the end of the day you only have them from 9 until 3*

*and at 3o'clock they go home to that home environment where they're not encouraged to do their homework they might just stick the telly on, they might just say I'm off out, their parents might go and sit down the pub every night or just not really pay much attention' (Kelly)*

Here Kelly explicitly contrasts her own home life in which her two parents were 'there', able to supervise homework and fill her time with day-trips and regular extra-curricular activities, against a home environment in which parents fail to supervise, control, and support their children and put their own interests first. Moreover, this lack of support is seen to be the fundamental brake upon what schools can hope to achieve for the children of such families – its 'what it boils down to at the end of the day'. Indeed, whilst middle class parents were seen to be engaged and active in their children's schooling, working class parents were seen to be 'the only thing that the school doesn't have control of'. In turn, as Lucy explained, 'I think that the thing to say is that they are outside of your control so, there is, it's created a blame culture of external factors outside the school'.

Indeed, a number of participants suggested that parental involvement within primary schools was much greater than in secondary schools. Moreover, this involvement was seen to tail off 'as you go down the sets and up the years'. Along with widely cited falls in parents evening attendance, participants also saw dwindling involvement as being marked by failure to monitor homework and sign weekly work-planners; failure to respond to written correspondence; and failure to answer or return phone calls, or even changed phone numbers to avoid them. Whilst Linda suggested that fear of 'this world that we know and all these different exams and the letters and all the data' was an important factor in this, Carol felt that many parents avoided secondary schools for fear of exposing their own low levels of literacy. Similarly, Anne explained that her own mother began to take much less of a role in her education when her own knowledge began to surpass that of her mothers around the age 12. Yet beyond this, low levels of school contact were much more likely to be attributed to the disinterested and uncaring attitude of parents. As Anthony explained in relation to parent's evenings:

*'you only get the ones who are interested because they don't turn up because they don't care, which, yeah, its one of the bigger problems with parents evenings which is that they are basically flawed really'*

Yet where parents did attend, it was routinely suggested that 'when you meet the parent you generally know why the kids are like they are'. In turn, this was seen to be useful in letting

teachers know which parents they could depend on for interest, engagement and support with pupils' education:

*'they're not encouraged, they're not surrounded by an environment like that at home because when you meet the parents they don't really have an interest in a lot of things apart from getting a few cans and that sounds really stereotypical but on parents evenings when you meet the parents like you're ready to have a go at the kids and say come on you're being too lazy, despondent and that and the parents sit down and then you kind of think well you can kind of see, I know that's horrible, but that's why parents evenings are so good because you can see if you're going to get the support from home, you rarely get a kid that is really lazy and not interested and then you meet the parents and they've been to uni and they're very excited about everything and educated and very encouraging, that rarely happens' (Miriam)*

This description of working class home environments as discouraging and headed by parents with few interests beyond 'getting a few cans' is here cast as being much more than a stereotype: validated by first hand encounters with parents who mirror their children in both sloth and hopelessness, and made all the more stark when set against the interest and excitement of parents who are university educated. For Sasha, the latter's enthusiasm for education accounted for them making parents evening an event which the whole family attended, conversing about curricula and modern art. In contrast, she described how when they did come, 'the lower ability parents just want to chat, talk'. With very few exceptions, cultural and economic capital were conspicuously absent from accounts of these points of contact and interactions between working class parents and schools, with questionable behaviours, attitudes and morality taking centre stage instead. In this respect, the poor parenting characteristic of the working class home environment was routinely seen as leaving children with a heavily circumscribed appreciation of the world and its possibilities:

*'Well I think we are actually sometimes the only role model they've ever had, somebody that actually values education and can show them the wider picture of things because quite often some of these students come with a very blinkered idea of life' (Sally)*

*'their general knowledge and knowledge of life and what's going on isn't very strong at all. Caroline Duffy was made poet laureate last week and the a quick mention of that just brought total disdain and really whereas I know if I mentioned that to the top group they would have been informed. You can make allusions with them. They know the world and because they know the wider world they have much more aspirations to go further and to go higher and they*

*have probably got access in one way or another to gifted and talented music or the maths challenge or they will be going off on science trips and but they would be given opportunities and they will be thinking big' (Pamela)*

Here Sally marks working class parents out as failing to value education and as poor role models for their children who are subsequently left with a 'very blinkered idea of life'. In turn, Pamela ponders the naivety of working class children; their connected inability to engage with casual cultural citations; and a corresponding shrivelling of aspiration and opportunity. Bourdieu (1986) reminds us that the working class habitus accrues no capital in the middle class field of education, with the invisible arbitrariness of the historically contingent yardstick amounting to symbolic violence through which the relations it sustains are maintained. Indeed, within both extracts, working class parents and pupils are cast as cultureless, unknowing, and 'empty vessels' that have nothing of their own to offer education and are trapped in a cycle of deprivation in which parents' failure to teach the value of education and impart knowledge of any worth holds their children back (Freire, 1970: 60). Yet whilst the sense that lack of, or low aspiration, was intergenerationally transmitted from parents to children was often subtle and implied, it could also surface in ways which were much more explicit:

*'well people who are in poverty tend to have low aspirations and tend to at least pass on those aspirations to their children which in this school there's some kids who just don't want to do anything and where do they get that attitude from? I imagine they got it from their parents. Why did they get it from their parents? Probably because their parents are doing nothing and it's quite a poor area as well that the school is based in' (Pete)*

Here low aspiration - or not wanting to do anything - is an attitude passed on by parents who do nothing. Beyond the fact that people who experience poverty tend to hold very traditional aspirations and attitudes to work (Lister, 2004, MacDonald & Marsh, 2005), Pete's citations of poverty merge and mingle with attitudinal traits, appearing as correlations and add-on's - 'people in poverty tend to have low aspirations', '*and its quite a poor area as well*'. In this respect, poverty is subtly transmuted and 'defined by behaviour' (Lister, 2004: 108). However, just as accounts could shift from within school structures and processes as placing tight limits on pupil's sense of what might be achieved to parent's, they could also do the same in relation to behaviour. Indeed, despite the fact that participants saw testing, setting, the omnipresence of the A\*-C economy, and weaknesses in the mechanics of teaching as generating poor

behaviour, it was just as easily seen to lie within the pathological attitudinal qualities of parents:

*'the kind of behavioural problems that you get, I mean some of them are just general swearing and don't want to work, mainly because the parents don't see the point in education and tell their children you've just got to go because it's cheaper than not having you at school, I'll get sent to prison if you don't go, that kind of attitude' (Suzanne)*

Linking the moral and behavioural deficiencies of parents to the delinquency of pupils is, again, the 'kind of attitude' in which education has no value beyond both the savings in living costs that attendance brings and the avoidance of sanctions for non-attendance. Yet whilst this echoes images in which disingenuous users of welfare display total disregard for the true value and purposes of what they receive, responding (perhaps) only to heavy legal deterrents (Levitas, 2005), poor behaviour was also seen as stemming from parents ignorance about the nature of good parenting. For instance, Linda saw the large proportion of 'socially deprived' parents in her schools community as being misguided in their approach to behaviour:

*'sitting and talking with them which would probably come naturally to a lot of parents it's not necessarily a natural skill that they would do so they reward and consequently when they [pupils] come to school and they're not allowed that reward they can play up'*

Gillies (2007: 2) points out that 'working class mothering practices are held up as the antithesis of good parenting, largely through their association with poor outcomes for children'. Indeed, Linda sees the good parenting central to 'normal child development' as something which does not come naturally to 'socially deprived' parents. Unlike the silently present (socially privileged) middle class parents for whom parenting skills are 'natural' and innate, their 'socially deprived' 'Others' are unknowing, inadequate and unable to socialise their children properly. In this respect, through a lack of parental support, interest, concern, discipline and a corresponding failure to instil ambition and aspiration, there was a sense that children from working class families were seen to complicate what schools and teachers aimed to achieve. For instance, as both Anthony and Pete explained:

*'in places like that, for example, you can only ever hope to just stop kids harming each other, make sure they get jobs and just leave them to it' (Anthony)*

*'in a place like this sometimes we've got to turn these kids into decent human beings rather than getting them the best results possible because that's what we want coming out at the age of 16, decent human beings who are going to go in society and actually do well regardless of what level of education they've got. People who can speak to you like a normal human being, who can speak to others like a normal human being, people who can actually try their hardest at things, who are resourceful, who can go out and find things for themselves, who can do things to the best of their ability, that's what we want to turn these kids into' (Pete)*

Weaved throughout these two extracts is an implicit message that the nature of the pupils to which they refer invalidate the normal rhythms of the educational enterprise, demanding a recalibration of its priorities so as to maximise the possibility that they might learn to resemble 'normal human beings'.

### ***Summary.***

Pulling these threads of data together begins to reveal the complex and often contradictory ways in which educational professionals both read and are enmeshed within the interplay between education policy, professional practice, and the difficulties and 'failures' associated with working class schools and pupils. Opening accounts highlighted the way in which desires to make a difference for pupils had not only steered decisions to teach, but was underpinned by a sense that teachers could function as inspirational role models, stimulating change at the level of individual lives. In turn, we have seen how the contemporary form of learning how to teach orbited a technical and procedural approach which eschewed issues relating to social class. Moreover, despite the tone and texture of contemporary university-based theoretical training, school-based practical training offered experiential immersion with schools that brought relative harmony to participant's accounts in terms of critical concerns and readings of the secondary school system. In this respect, a caring, active and engaged middle class emerged as the lynchpin animating the links between league tables, the size and nature of pupil intakes, and levels of both funding and staff in ways which locked schools and teachers into a competitive system of survival of results in which improving their performance data had become their *raison d'être*. In turn, as the key lubricant of efforts to survive/improve, predictive data formed the building blocks for thinking about pupils in terms of ability from their earliest moments of secondary schooling. However, whilst participants were concerned about the ways in which predictive data and connected performance targets could narrow the content and purposes of teaching and write pupils off, these facets of accounts were essentially critical descriptions of what happens. Moreover, as

the cornerstone of these dynamics, whilst league tables were regularly singled out as something participants wished to see the back of, as the key way in which thinking about pupils in terms of ability fed into the ways in which they were processed, the practice of setting was not. Yet whilst sets were about matching teaching to ability for the maximisation of results, participants nonetheless qualified this function by pointing to the concentration of benefits at the top of the scholastic order, with those pupils further down seen as developing increasingly fragile learning identities/orientations to school/schoolwork, poor behaviour, and lower levels of confidence. Whilst participants deepened these additional critical descriptions of what happens with accounts of the varying expectations/attitudes with which they approached different sets, these largely social accounts of the ways in which pupils were thought about and processed failed to win out against notions of ability embedded across ITT, predictive data, connected targets/efforts to survive/improve, and setting itself. This was made stark by the way in which prompted descriptions of the tendency for the scholastic hierarchy to reflect divisions of social class gave way to a default and synergistic language of ability and hierarchical sets.

These blends of complexity and contradiction were repeated in relation to the forceful and decisive reassertion of imperatives to survive/improve at the end of pupils' schooling. Indeed, whilst the narrow distribution of opportunities for pupils to improve their GCSE results was paradoxically seen as being both iniquitous and a pragmatic moral/professional necessity, the success of intervention sat awkwardly with the vocationalisation of the curriculum encouraged by imperatives to survive/improve which were circularly tied to thinking about and processing pupils in terms of ability/fixed pupil typologies. In a connected way, this formed the boundaries of concerns about curricular issues, and whilst the relative levels of boredom and misbehaviour of pupils beyond top sets was explicitly linked back to procedural and technical weaknesses in the mechanics of teaching, the fact that behaviour joined ability in determining assignments to sets which were themselves also cited as being generative of mis/behaviour appeared to go unnoticed. Yet at the same time, in edging back towards social accounts, whilst participants saw themselves as engaged in efforts to 'fight' against and counter the fragile learning identities generated within schools, these efforts were themselves frail and precarious, with relationships with pupils more routinely about getting them 'onside' so as to make progress with the mechanics of teaching. Finally, we have seen how this medley of contradictions was also supplemented with potent, additional layers of discussion about working class parents and home life which portrayed



them as being pathological, deficient, and fundamental curbing what schools and teachers could hope to achieve.

# 7

## **The View from Below: Experiences of Primary School.**

### ***Introduction.***

For more than a decade children and young people spend a significant portion of their daily lives in schools, and for many, starting out at primary school marks their first sustained encounters with institutions beyond their family lives. In this respect, the fabric of their worlds alter as they enter into new and shifting balances of relations between home and school - between parents/carers, peers and teachers. It is these early educational experiences that form the basis of this chapter; the first of two which draws upon data generated via the study's 17 biographically orientated interviews with working class young people. Through their narratives of primary schooling, we explore participants' early and ongoing emersion within the webs of social relations and institutional/processural structures within which their learning careers begin to take shape. Examining the different and changing patterns and meanings that emerge from these facets of experience not only begins to reveal the heterogeneity of working class young people's educational experiences, but the ways in which their learning careers are already shaped in particular ways by the time they begin at secondary school.

### ***Early Social-Structural Formations.***

Accounts of beginning primary school were marked by varying degrees of fear about bullying, new physical environments and strict teachers, as well as excitement about the promise of new friendships and learning opportunities. Whilst Cher, Zac, Mike and John's accounts were crosscut by bullying, many participants also recounted how problems with schoolwork and/or problems with teachers had unfolded through, within, and against ongoing encounters with school structures and processes and the intersections of peers and home. As the lone exception, Tim described his time at primary school as being 'pretty easy', detailing the way in which he was interested, attentive, regularly completed homework, made good progress, and enjoyed good relations with his teachers with whom he only ever clashed on account of his 'chattiness'. In this respect, his account stood out from the rest in being free of the intersecting events and experiences which many participants saw as beginning to push and pull at their primary careers from the outset.

For instance, starting primary schooling several weeks after his family repatriated following several years abroad, Dean found it difficult to be away from his parents, which in turn fed into a number of other problems throughout the bulk of his primary career:

*'I spent all day every day thinking where's my mum and dad and not actually, I was upset a lot of the time. Most days I didn't want to go to school' (Dean)*

Indeed, whilst Dean did not find primary schoolwork hard, missing his family meant that he generally had little motivation for schoolwork and often did the bare minimum just to avoid serious conflict with teachers. Yet this, combined with his 'not wanting to be there', meant that his teachers were 'always annoyed', and he regularly responded by faking illnesses at school in an attempt to gain their sympathy or better still, to be sent home. This situation also meant that Dean found it difficult to make friends, and it was only when he eventually made a solid circle of friends during year 6 that he began to settle into his primary schooling. Yet in contrast, Alice described the ways in which she quickly settled into primary school, enjoying the majority of schoolwork and developing a strong position amongst peers. Indeed, as a 'Tomboy', Alice explained that she was able to move between her year-groups circles of popular girls and boys, with involvement in the latter often tied to misbehaviour and 'having a laugh' which brought her into frequent conflict with teachers. In addition, following the racial abuse of her step-sister in another class, Alice felt that her mum's decision to temporarily remove both of them from school angered teachers and meant that despite her good academic performance, the wake of this event combined with her own misbehaviour and led them to 'hate' her.

Such accounts begin to demonstrate the delicate convergence of factors which contributed to the early and ongoing formation of participants social-structural positions *vis a vis* their families, peers, teachers, and their own sense of self. In this respect, they also begin to highlight the ways in which such formations are inextricably tied to the peculiarities of individual biography – family migration and adjustment, peers and teachers (Dean), gender/peer relations, the multi-ethnic family and teachers (Alice). However, these tentative social-structural positions could also intersect with issues relating to schoolwork and learning.

### ***Schoolwork & Learning.***

Indeed, whilst Dean's relative isolation from peers had never bothered him or led to any serious bullying, Mike's initial unease about the size of his primary school and its large intake

hampered his ability to form a close circle of friends and subsequently left him vulnerable to bullying. Whilst many participants made their pre- to primary school transitions with a group of friends from the former, both Triston and Macey were able to manage similar situations to Mike by initially joining the friendship groups of older siblings. Yet for Mike, bullying meant he was often in trouble for fighting which in turn earned him a poor reputation amongst teachers. In addition, Mike had trouble with English and often got frustrated when unable to understand things, generating additional conflict with teachers and thereby doing little for his poor reputation:

*'I never used to understand my own handwriting so then I would get in a real bad mood obviously cause I couldn't understand it... It used to get on my nerves and then if they would say at break-time I've got to do handwriting class I would get in a mood about it, I don't want to do it... and then I would get told off again and I would argue back'*

Indeed, many participants described a similar dynamic in which anxieties about schoolwork and/or progress in their learning underpinned conflictual relationships with teachers and/or a tendency to 'give up' on their primary schooling. For instance, in a similar way to Mike, Gemma initially found primary school to be an intimidating place because of her own small physical size and only enjoyed her first year because her teacher was 'warm' and 'reassuring'. In addition, she made the transition from pre- to primary school with 3 friends from the latter who also helped her to settle in and make additional friends. However, when Gemma's family moved house the following year, she started at a different school in which she found it hard to make friends and the teachers shouted more than her previous school. This left her feeling 'really insecure' and she subsequently returned to her first school whereupon this sense of insecurity intensified following her assignment to 'special' maths and English classes because she was 'not that clever'. Gemma explained that these classes made her feel 'stupid' and 'looked down on' by both peers and teachers, and that as a result:

*'I preferred doing more practical stuff like making stuff, I never liked anything that involved using my brain... I didn't think I could do it so I just gave up'*

In turn, whilst Tam reported hating primary school because it was 'crap, boring', she also described herself as loving it because she got to be with her friends and 'have a laugh'. As a result, Tam suggested that for the bulk of her primary schooling she was a 'disruptive pupil' perpetually in conflict with teachers. Yet when invited to explore her hatred of primary school

in greater detail, she explained that she had struggled a great deal with schoolwork and had found it very hard to ask for help:

*'It was embarrassment, because everyone else could do it and there was just me, and I was like well, if they can do it why can't I? They're not asking for help so I'm not going to'*

Although Tam had recently discovered herself to be Dyslexic, in a similar way to Mike, she described the ways in which managing her difficulty with schoolwork was often at the root of her conflict with teachers:

*'They [the school] were meant to test me for Dyslexia but they didn't do it and as soon as I came here [the KTS training centre] they tested me and I have got Dyslexia so all the way through school they didn't know so they were handing me work and I couldn't do it and I would get my rat on. I was like I'm not doing it, and they were like well you've got to do it or you're going to get excluded, so I was just like, all the way through school I was being kicked out constantly, in and out, in and out'*

Taken together, Mike's sense of frustration, Gemma's feeling 'stupid'/'looked down on', and Tam's embarrassment in relation to problems with schoolwork and learning suggest a normative awareness of their edging beyond the ability/intelligence that constitutes the 'ideal learner' (Youdell, 2006: 99). In this sense, embedded within these recollections is an implicit recognition of early selves as educational others - 'impossible learner[s]' who were struggling, unable, unknowing and abnormal (*ibid*). In turn, Mike's subsequent 'bad moods'/'arguing back' and Tam's disruptive and conflictual relationships with teachers suggest that problems with schoolwork and learning also pushed them beyond the boundaries of the 'good learner' as obedient, polite, yielding, and restrained (*ibid*). Yet at the same time, Gemma's feeling 'stupid'/'looked down on' and Tam's 'embarrassment'/'not asking for help' suggest that they experienced their problems with schoolwork and learning as shameful and humiliating. However, whilst these accounts of problems with schoolwork and learning add further layers of complexity to the early and variegated formations of social structural positions and self, as narratives moved on they were increasingly crosscut by issues relating to the nature and form of school structures and processes.

### ***Hanging Together: SAT's, Sets & Mates.***

Whilst Casey was unable to recall having done primary SAT's, the remainder of participants characterised them as special events marked by letters home, permission to bring favourite toys in, being seated in silent halls and receiving sweet treats for afterwards. In turn, whilst

some described the importance which teachers openly attached to them, others described the way in which they attempted to downplay their significance. Nevertheless, participants were themselves divided in relation to the importance they attached to SAT's. Whilst some took them in their 'stride', seeing them as 'just a test' which was trumped by the importance of those taken at secondary school, others saw them as important because they were linked to their assignment to sets. For instance, despite continuing problems with bullying, Cher recalled enjoying primary school up until the SAT's she took in her second year and subsequent assignment to sets the year after:

*'C: when you get to year 3 it all gets split up into groups of how bright you are and stuff like that and I don't think it's really fair to separate tables into higher groups, I know they still do it now.*

*W: Yeah.*

*C: I think that knocks your confidence because you sort of got treated a bit differently in year 3, the teachers tended to favour the ones that are a bit up their own bums more than the ones that couldn't really do it to be honest. That's what I can remember and that's when it all just, I don't know.'*

Whilst the practice of segregating pupils by ability within single institutions – creating 'schools within schools' (Simon, 1953: 34) - has a long history, so too does the research documenting the sense of inferiority, disillusionment, demotivation, lowered expectations and underachievement experienced by the working class pupils who tend to dominate bottom and lower groups (*ibid*; Hargreaves, 1967; Nash, 1971, 1973; Ball, 1981, Boaler, 1997, Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). In this respect, whilst Cher's reference to the unfairness of being treated differently (less favourably) by teachers on the basis of relative 'brightness' (dimness) provides further glimpses of such 'hidden injuries' (Sennett & Cobb, 1972), the resulting 'knock' to her confidence suggests that this differentiation pushed her beyond any belief that she was/could be an 'ideal learner' – bright, promising, able – towards an acknowledgment that she was one of 'the ones who couldn't do it'.

Yet the potency of the synergy between SAT's and sets was also etched into accounts of year 6 SAT's as central to secondary school transitions, shedding further light on the ways in which bottom sets were often constructed as worthless and feared educational spaces to be avoided:

*'It was a bit nerve-wracking [year 6 SAT's] and I thought I'm not getting to this school [her choice of secondary school] if I don't get the good grades or anything but if I did then I would get put in the bottom classes and stuff' (Macey)*

*'I never knew what it stood for [SAT's] but I did know that it was to test our abilities so that secondary schools could use them. So I thought to myself that this is important because I don't want to be in bottom sets in secondary school' (Gemma)*

In this respect, whilst division over the importance of SAT's continued in much the same vein, for many, rather than aiding differentiation and inclusion for the attainment of higher standards, SAT's were seen as fundamental to shaping their schooling careers in terms of the limits and boundaries of future success and failure. Indeed, for both Macey and Gemma bottom sets are positioned as the worst kind of outcome - the antithesis of success. Yet even where participants assigned little significance to SAT's and/or failed to acknowledge their link to setting, sets were largely seen as being significant in their own right. Indeed, whilst participants described the way in which being allocated to different primary sets meant sitting at tables named after different colours, animals, or trees, awareness of their relative positions within the hierarchy of sets emerged through the different kinds of work each table received and discussions with peers. Within this, participants' accounts suggested that such awareness involved an appreciation of their own relative academic abilities:

*'There weren't many [top set pupils], there were probably about three kids who were smarter than me and most of the other kids weren't really like that intelligent' (John)*

*W: Did you know that you were a bit more 'brainy' than the other people?*

*A: Yeah, we used to rub people's faces in it.*

*W: In what sort of ways?*

*A: Because when they didn't get something and we had already finished our work because we got different work to them as well, and we had to go round and help them and we just used to sit there and like no I'm not helping them they're stupid, they can do it themselves and they used to be okay help me and we would be like no, idiot. Not in a horrible way, in a jokey way. We would help them in the end after some banter' (Alice)*

Indeed, whilst John, Alice, Macey, and Matt were consistently assigned to top sets, the sense of superiority and educational worth this appeared to have given them stood in contrast to that

of a number of the remaining participants who were largely assigned to middle and bottom sets:

*'I think I purposely then, once I had been put in the middle, did underachieve because I thought oh well I'm only in the middle so I'm not supposed to be doing that good anyway'*  
(Cher)

*'I didn't want to be in the bottom because I always felt down. And I guess that's why in senior school I played up as well because of it felt like I was always in the bottom class there as well so I thought I was in bottom class, what was the point of doing the work?'* (Dan)

Such comments follow the grooves of a Bourdieuan phenomenology in which a sense of both world and self are (re)hewn from meaningful and additive subjective experiences of an unequal objective social order. Recorded and ratified through formal assessment (SAT's) and enacted through their assignment to devalued positions within hierarchical institutional structures (middle and bottom sets) (Bourdieu 2000), these narratives are at once an internalisation and performance of the limits and thresholds that envelop and shape their lives *as bounded lives*. Cher's 'purposeful' restructuring of her horizons – the delimitation of what she *can be* educationally – issues from her *being in* an educational space which marks her out as someone who is not 'supposed to be doing that good' - as 'other' to the 'ideal learner'. In turn, the distance that Dan's *'be[ing] in bottom'* opens up from the normative centre of the educational project renders the products of his mental labour (schoolwork) 'pointless', stripping his validity as a scholastic being so that he *becomes* an educational other – a 'bad learner' who 'played up'.

Yet whilst the majority of participants saw and/or experienced lower sets as devalued educational spaces to be avoided, for many, their encounters and experiences of setting meandered throughout their schooling careers. In a connected way, these twists and turns highlighted the ways in which the impact of SAT's and setting upon participants' learning identities was not totalising and final, and that injurious encounters with devalued educational spaces could also underpin a determination to avoid them in future. For instance, despite the shame, humiliation and 'giving up' Gemma experienced in relation to her early assignment to 'special' maths and English, her receipt of this additional support appears to have been paralleled by the development of a determination to escape bottom sets at secondary school through realised success in her year 6 SAT's which saw her reassigned to middle and top sets



just ahead of her transition. In turn, Carl's primary career was similar to both Mike and Tam's in that problems with written work often led to confrontations with teachers and a poor reputation for behaviour which underpinned his hatred of school and 'not wanting to go'. However, Carl found maths to be an easy subject and described himself as an 'above average'/'normal' pupil in this respect who was initially assigned to the top set. Yet when his teacher later moved him to a lower set and he found the work too 'easy and boring', Carl's mum made an unsuccessful appeal to the head that Carl be moved back up again. Concluding his account of his mum's failure to challenge his reassignment, Carl explained that when the family moved house in year 5, she had given both him and his brother the choice of also moving to different school:

*'Jack was like oh I don't want to move away from my mates, I want to stay, and I said oh I don't want to go there anymore because obviously the teachers and then my mum said yes I think its for the best if you move, so I moved'*

Earlier accounts of problems with schoolwork and learning suggested that they could be experienced as shameful and humiliating, generating conflict with teachers in a way which rendered them both 'impossible' and 'bad learners' (Youdell, 2006). In turn, Carl's feeling 'above average' and 'normal' as a result of being in top set maths silently calls bottom sets in to being as sites for the below average and educationally abnormal. This small claim to educational validity perhaps explains how, despite the alienating rhythm of bottom set maths ('easy and boring'), he refused the symbolic violence stowed in his teachers judgments (equating him with such work) and, after his mothers failed attempt to move him vertically through social structural space, he decided to move horizontally and start again at another school.

However, whilst the majority saw sets as being important, for a few participants assigned largely to middle sets they were much less so. For instance, it is in stark contrast to the importance Carl attached to setting that Leon's difficulty with maths led him to personally request that he be moved down a set from top to middle. However, as his comments also begin to suggest, the importance of friendship was also a powerful cross-cutting influence on how a number of participants felt about sets:

*'I moved down in the end because I asked to be moved down to the lower one but it was because my friends were in the lower class as well, so that was part of the reason why I moved down' (Leon)*

Similarly, for Dean the constant longing for his parents that had brought him into conflict with teachers and left him relatively isolated from peers was challenged when his family moved house. Indeed, when both of Dean's parents were laid-off from the pub in which they worked, the family moved in with friends before finding work in a different neighbourhood. This meant that during this period Dean got to spend lots of time with his parents which helped to 'make things a bit different' when he moved to his new neighbourhood primary at the beginning of year 6. Whilst he continued to describe himself as an 'unmotivated' pupil, he developed a close group of friends which trumped any concerns for where he was in the hierarchy of sets. In turn, his comments also further highlight the subtle ways in which sets began to feed into the structuring of peer relations:

*'each table was a group of friends anyway but a lot of people did mix and match. The funny ones on the not so clever tables were still friends with everyone anyway. There was a difference there but being sat on the middle table I didn't really think about like I want to be sat there because they are or because they're higher, I'd just rather be sat with my friends' (Dean).*

Indeed, whilst relationships between sets and peers were presented as nascent and loose within accounts of primary schooling, in relation to secondary schooling they were a dominant component of participant's narratives, tallying with other research examining these relationships in which their salience swells as pupils move through the years (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 1977; Ball, 1981; Brown, 1987). That said, Shelly stood out in describing not only what she saw as a more rigid division in primary school between 'behaved' pupils who concentrated on getting their work done and 'naughty' pupils who did not, but raising curriculum issues over and above the importance of SAT's and sets, and alongside the importance of friendship. Indeed, having made a smooth transition from pre- to primary school with a group of friends from the former, when asked to explore how she had come to be a 'naughty' pupil, Shelly explained that whilst she never struggled with schoolwork she had generally found it to be 'boring' and that the fact that 'there was nothing interesting... just led you off track'. Whilst she suggested that this had been more acute in secondary school, Shelly explained that despite efforts to fake illnesses that would allow her to

avoid school altogether, her friends were the best thing about having to go to primary school, and trumped any concern for where she was in the hierarchy of sets:

*'I wasn't fussed [about setting], it was just like whatever I was put in I would just go along with. As long as I was with my mates I wasn't bothered' (Shelly)*

Indeed, unlike other participants who experienced lower sets for the majority of their schooling careers, for Shelly, they did not involve injuries to the self. In turn, whilst many participants cited being regularly/sporadically bored with schoolwork, as we will see, she also differed in failing to take even an 'alienated instrumental' approach to it (Brown, 1987; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). Instead, Shelly displayed a deep and growing rejection of the formal school culture in terms of work, behaviour, dress code, and her relationships with teachers and top set pupils, culminating in frequent truanting and eventual failure to complete her compulsory schooling. In this respect, her orientation to school mirrored descriptions of anti-school pupil subcultures described in other research. However, rather than processes of educational differentiation (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981), an explicit fetishisation of working class culture (Willis, 1977), or a rupture in the relevance of school to a perceived future occupational self (Brown, 1987; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005), Shelly framed her response to school as something circumscribed by the immediacy of her experience:

*'W: Did you still have something in the back of your mind that was like in the long run I know that I need to like do well at school?*

*S: Not in the school. I do now. I always say to my brother all the time, concentrate, don't mess up because now if I could go back I would go back and do it completely different but in school my dad was always saying to me you'll regret it when you leave but I never listened and I do now.'*

Yet within this, she also explained that 'the teachers that I got on with would be the ones that if you were doing something good they'd make it a fun time for you sort of thing... you'd make sure you'd learn in that class'.

These accounts of SAT's, sets and peer relations highlight the complex ways in which these key facets of school structure and process fed into the ongoing formation of participants social structural positions and self. Indeed, whilst for some, the importance of SAT's was trumped by

tests and exams at secondary school, and for others, they were important because they determined positions within the hierarchy of sets, setting itself was more consistently seen as being significant. Indeed, bottom sets were seen and experienced as devalued educational spaces, and whilst for some, being in them could feed into becoming a certain kind of ‘abnormal learner’ and/or ‘bad learner’, the injurious impact to scholastic selves that this entailed was similarly felt, but not internalised to the same degree by others. Moreover, these facets of experience emerged through relational processes of perception and recognition of social-structural positions relative to others, and by the same note, also fed into a sense of superiority for those assigned to top sets. Yet within this, for participants placed largely in middle sets, where they were in terms of the academic hierarchy was much less important than being with friends, offering in turn, tentative insights into the links between setting and peer relations. In addition, alongside the primacy of friendship, Shelly placed the nature of schoolwork over and above setting when accounting for the general hatred of school which held her account of her schooling career together from start to finish.

### ***The Interpenetration of Home & School.***

Schoolwork in the form of homework formed part of the broader relationships between home and school weaved into participants’ accounts, and often started to be received during years 4, 5, and 6. Whilst both Triston and Gemma were able to recall very little in relation to primary homework, for Mike, Tam, and Casey, general problems with schoolwork meant that they consistently avoided homework altogether and regularly found themselves in further conflict with teachers as a result. In turn, Shelly’s general sentiment that schoolwork was boring meant that she never attempted it. Yet for Cher, having had her confidence and enthusiasm for school knocked by her experiences of SAT’s and setting, she explained that getting into a subsequent ‘routine of not caring’ intersected with her family’s limited ability to help with homework:

*‘Half the time I didn’t understand it and so I couldn’t be bothered. It got to the point when I started school with a good attitude, a positive attitude and then by the middle of school I didn’t want to do anything. My Nan [Cher’s grandparents were her primary carers] would try and help but she’s, nor my mum because my mum obviously didn’t finish school so I’ve never really had family to help me... That’s the time when you need a teacher isn’t it but obviously teachers expect you to go home and ask your family’*

Indeed, the majority of participants explained that even where they themselves avoided doing primary school homework their parents/carers would have been willing and able to have

helped them up until their secondary years. However, Cher's account not only highlights the way in which the limits of parents/carers abilities to act as educators can be reached much earlier in an educational career, but situates this within a dense lattice of additional intersections. At one level, her parallel experiences of SAT's, setting, and the development of a 'routine of not caring' are both reconfigured and reflected in an account of homework in which frequent difficulties in understanding it are tied to a subsequent indifference and supplanting of an initially 'good' and 'positive attitude' to school with a sense of not 'want[ing] to do anything'. Yet with her family unable to provide an educational counterweight to this dynamic, Cher subtly articulates the way in which educational inequalities written into the lives of earlier generations of her family are powerfully present in the sculpting of her own schooling career. In this respect, for Cher the paradox of 'never really [having] had family to help' is that schools and teachers work on the assumption that you 'go home and ask your family', thereby displacing the kind of teacher/teaching she would otherwise require – 'that's the time when you need a teacher isn't it[?]'.

In turn, whilst Dan also pointed to his parents' limited ability to help him with primary schoolwork, he joined Zac, Carl, and Dean in explaining his avoidance of homework as a way of maintaining a valued division between home and school which ultimately deepened conflict with their teachers:

*'I didn't really want to do it because I didn't think it was, school is school and work is not to do at home, it was just odd to me that people actually did it at home so I didn't. I got called into the head teachers office quite a lot to talk about it' (Dean)*

Whilst Casey, John, Leon and Macey often completed homework, both Tim and Matt explained that their parents often linked control of their own free time to its completion. However, beyond this more overtly regulatory approach to homework, it was clear from participants' accounts that they saw their parents/carers as deeply and positively invested in their schooling which was in turn often seen to be linked to parents' desires that participants do better at school than they had done:

*'They've always wanted me to get on and do well. Like my dad says he never wanted me to turn down his road but I pretty much have apart from I can read and write and he can't' (Dan)*

*‘when my dad did school he sort of mucked around a bit an didn’t do as well in his grades and stuff an he did have a good job because he went into an apprenticeship but if it wasn’t for the apprenticeship he wouldn’t have got anywhere, and my mum doesn’t want me ending up in the job that she’s doing at the moment, working in a store and stuff’ (Matt)*

Once again, such comments draw together a complex medley of cross-cutting layers, calling up questions of aspiration and mobility in which education straddles the fate of generations of working class people. Indeed, through their own words the messages Dan and Matt’s parents have impressed upon them are not only clear, but clearly valorise education. They stress a neutral meritocratic link between education and mobility through which individuals can author/better their lives as a matter of choice – a choice they ultimately failed to take themselves. Yet amongst the imagery of ‘turning down roads’ and ‘mucking about’, educational-come-occupational fates are lined with expressions of value and worth in which Dan and Matt are encouraged to not become like their parents – to ‘end up’ working in a store, or as an illiterate refuse collector (Dan’s father). Alongside this fusion of scholastic and human dignity (Bourdieu, 1984), the educational imperative is reinforced by Matt’s account of the precariousness of the links between grades tainted by ‘mucking about’ and the apprenticeship which landed his father a ‘good job’ and without which ‘he wouldn’t have got anywhere’. In this respect, what is grasped and articulated are working class parental ‘frames of reference’ (FOR’s) in which educational endeavour and qualifications are seen as necessary for children’s future social and occupational selves; for ‘getting on’ within, or ‘getting out’ of the working class (Brown, 1987). At one level then, Dan and Matt’s parents’ reading of their own educational and occupational selves as products of individual pathology allow for hopes that things may be different for their children, offering glimpses of desires that they will use education to not be like them; to be more than them. Yet at the same time, given the relative inevitability of the symmetry between working class ‘origins and destinations’ notwithstanding education (Halsey *et al*, 1980), they simultaneously devalue the very spaces their children are likely to inhabit whilst reinforcing the potential that they might also read their arrival through the lens of individual pathology.

Yet just as Tim’s and Matt’s parents had been strict in relation to homework, Dan, Casey, Shelly and Zac also articulated their parents’/carers’ encouraging emphasis on educational success via accounts of the ways in which frequent contact from teachers regarding misbehaviour resulted in their getting into serious trouble at home. In addition, whilst the majority of parents/carers had regularly attended parents evenings, Dean’s parents family pub

had made it difficult for them to attend, and Gemma's dad's job as a long-distance haulier meant that after she moved in with her elderly grandparents when her mum left the family during year 4, it was rare that anybody was able to attend parents evenings. However, both described the ways in which there was an expectation that they try their best at school, with Dean's father also showing regular anger and disappointment at his behaviour and subsequent performance. In turn, the importance that parents/carers attached to participants' education was also written into their accounts of the way in which they attempted to intervene in their primary schooling when problems arose. Indeed, alongside Carls mum's unsuccessful attempts to get him reassigned to top-set maths after he found the work too easy following his reassignment to bottom, Tam described the way in which she regularly discussed her difficulty with schoolwork with her mum who also made unsuccessful attempts to have Tam tested for Dyslexia. Whilst we saw how Carl's mum was eventually able to 'challenge' his schools decision indirectly from without by arranging for him to change schools, Tam's mum was not only unable to influence Tam's schooling career by dismantling official judgements of her performance as individual pathology, but like Dan's and Cher's parents/carers, also struggled to intervene as educator at home. Moreover, in contrast to the collective and authoritative efforts of the middle class parents of Reay's (1998b) study who successfully pressured their children's secondary school to abandon mixed-ability classrooms, Cher's Nan's response to the less favourable treatment ability sets entailed for non-top set pupils was limited to repeated appeals to fairness which Cher felt teachers either struggled to or were unwilling to accommodate. Indeed, describing her Nan as 'always [having] been about school; school has been very important', she explained that:

*'They [teachers] didn't want to help. They only helped the people in the higher ones [sets] like I said, they would only help the people that were doing really well at the start. The people that weren't they would just be well do this instead. I think it was a big effort for the teachers. The amount of times my Nan had to go in and say look don't treat the other ones different you know you need to treat them all the same, it was unbelievable'*

These threads of participant's accounts highlight not only the ways in which parents/carers overlapped with the purposes and processes of schooling, but also reveals some tentative insights into participants' own attempts to manage the relationship between home and school. Indeed, whilst some participants could not recall getting homework, for others it was either avoided because it intersected with problems with schoolwork and learning or because it infringed a valued division between school and home, both of which led to/deepened

conflict with teachers. Beyond this, whilst parents/carers were willing to help with homework, some were nonetheless limited in their ability to act as educators at home. Moreover, the more regulatory approach of a few parents to homework was paralleled by others in relation to behavioural issues raised by the school, forming part of a universal valorisation of education in which participants felt they were encouraged to do well if not better at school than their parents had done. Whilst these aspirations were rooted in a meritocratic reading of education which could subtly link the prospect of participants becoming like their parents to individual pathology, attempts to interact with teachers and schools to keep participants schooling careers on course were limited, and at the very best, brought bounded success.

### ***Teachers.***

Preceding discussions have been laced with accounts of points of conflict between participants and teachers which have predominantly orbited intersections between other threads of participants' primary school careers. For instance, examining the early formation of social structural positions, both Dean's account of not wanting to be in school after his family's repatriation and the combination of Alice's 'Tomboyish' behaviour and mothers reaction to the racial abuse of her step-sister led to difficult relationships with teachers. In turn, Mike, Tam and Carl's accounts of problems with schoolwork and learning have highlighted the way in which being a less than 'ideal learner' in academic terms could feed into becoming a 'bad learner' in behavioural terms (Youdell, 2006). At the same time, alongside assignment to devalued lower sets (Dan's 'playing up') and alienation from schoolwork (Shelly - 'nothing interesting... led you off-track'), this could also intersect with homework to generate/deepen conflict with teachers in ways which were in turn circularly linked to problems with schoolwork and learning (Tam, Casey, Dan), a valued division between home and school (Dan, Dean, Zac, Carl), and/or the limited ability of parents to act as educators at home (Cher, Dan, Tam). Indeed, with the exception of Tim who explained that teachers had been 'one of the best things about primary school', the remainder of participants flagged relationships with teachers as having been problematic for them at some point in their primary careers, with many suggesting that they had been the worst thing about this period of schooling. Moreover, whilst positive experiences with teachers were able to disrupt the tone and direction of careers, it was often forms of differential treatment deemed to be unjustified to which participants were most sensitive.



For instance, whilst Tim described the way in which his teachers regularly ‘gave out prizes and awards and trips for the best pupils’, for Macey, the hallmark of a good teacher was one who consistently treated pupils equally:

*‘The ones that I liked were nice to kids and everything, they didn’t have favourites, they liked you all the same, and they would always help you with your work and stuff but the ones I didn’t like they were more favouritism towards other pupils and then if you had your hand up to answer something they purposefully wouldn’t pick you’*

In turn, whilst Cher’s general frustration with her teachers’ favouritism for pupils who were ‘doing really well at the start’ fed into the development of her ‘routine of not caring’ about school, Gemma articulated her dislike of favouritism via descriptions of a specific injurious incident:

*‘I remember we all tried out for these pen licences because we weren’t allowed to write in pen without one... and I was one of the last ones to get mine but I did sort of like the teacher but I resented him in another way because it was like he had his favourites’*

In contrast, both Carl and Dan rooted their hatred of primary school in what they saw to be too much attention from teachers in the form of tight policing of their behaviour. For instance, Carl explained that in the years preceding his decision to move schools after being moved down a set for maths, in a similar way to Mike and Tam, the fact he struggled with written work meant that he would often ‘lose it’ and ‘strike back’ at teachers when they confronted him about his subsequent lack of work. In turn, he suggested that on a day-to-day basis this meant that he was often singled-out for closer surveillance and heavier punishment than his peers for general misbehaviour. Similarly, while exploring his hatred of primary school Dan explained that:

*‘well I didn’t like my head teacher. Everything I did he called me into the office, I used to have to spend like a whole hour lunchtime in his office for weeks, he would give me a two week set... every single little thing I did he pulled me up on... [and] there was a teacher called Mr Dale and he absolutely hated me and every time I used to do the tiniest thing he used to send me there [to the head]’*

Beyond this, many participants recalled a deep dislike of the way in which teachers were too strict and often resorted to shouting as a way of punishing pupils and maintaining control of the classroom. As John put it:

*'After a couple of years you get used to it, it was the way teachers were. If you did something bad then they would shout at you, it was the way they had to keep control'*

However, in contrast to the conflict and distance which characterized the bulk of participants' relationships with teachers, there were several accounts of the ways in which the teacher-pupil relationship could be of an altogether different nature. Indeed, earlier we saw not only how Gemma pointed to the importance of her reception year teacher in helping her to settle in before moving to a school where strict 'shouty' teachers left her feeling 'really insecure', but the way in which Shelly suggested that despite the generally alienating content of schooling she both learned and 'got on with' those teachers who made things 'fun'. Similarly, Alice explained that whilst she felt her tomboyish misbehaviour and mother's reaction to the bullying of her sister had led her teachers to dislike her, she was able to develop a different kind of relationship with her final year teacher:

*'she was young and she let me and my friend hang around with her and we did the work but we just sat with the teacher all the time and chatting like she was our friend even though she was way older than us but because she was the younger teacher sort of thing'*

In turn, when Carl decided to change schools following conflict with teachers and his reassignment to lower set maths, besides being kept in at lunchtime to complete homework which he continued to avoid doing at home, he found his new teachers to be more patient with regards his writing difficulties, more forthcoming with help, and fairer in the management of his misbehaviour. Similarly, continuing to manage her undiagnosed dyslexia in ways which generated conflict with teachers, Tam was placed in an in-house 'special unit' at the start of year 6 along with several other 'disruptive' pupils. However, she explained that she quickly came to like the two teachers who taught in the unit, developing close relationships which allowed her to make progress in her learning:

*'T: ...the two teachers that were working with me they knew me, do you know what I mean, they knew my personality and everything else but I just didn't get to know all the other teachers, they didn't really know me, they didn't know how to take me.'*

*W: So there was...*

*T: A bond, yes, cause they knew what to expect from me and I knew what to expect from them. You've got to have like, people you work with you've got to put your trust in them isn't it?*

Yet whilst Tam stressed the importance of developing a trusting bond with her teachers, Dan explained that in contrast to the strict policing from other teachers that made him not want to go to school, 'the best teacher in the school' was the one who showed him 'respect' in the way that she spoke to him:

*'they were just snobby and all that, they believed that because they were all type of posh, the type of person that would come from Rowton or something like that, they didn't know how to control me... but if Miss Jones asked me to stop doing something then I would have stopped doing it straight away but if Mr Dale would have told me I would have carried on doing it'*

These accounts of teacher-pupil relations begin to highlight the ways in which teachers featured within participants' primary school careers, often intersecting in turn with parallel facets of experience. Indeed, whilst the conflict with teachers lacing earlier accounts of problems with/alienation from schoolwork and learning, assignment to lower sets, and issues relating to homework join up with additional narratives of favouritism, overpolicing, this generally negative flavour is interrupted by accounts of mostly individual teachers who appeared to be able to steer relationships and their impact in a different direction.

### ***Choosing Secondary Schools.***

Whilst participants and their parents/carers often attended school open days as part of the decision making process, many explained that the final decision about which secondary school to attend had been their own. Moreover, where choices had existed and participants had had control over them, the process of choosing where to attend was often closely worked out in relation to peers and older siblings. For instance Tam's desire to go wherever her friends went meant that she attended a school just several minutes walk from her house. In contrast, most of Shelly's primary school friends were from a neighbourhood whose secondary school was embedded in a sometimes violent rivalry with that of her own neighbourhood. However, given that she spent most of her free time out on the streets in the former, she choose to stay with her friends and opted for a short daily bus-ride to the school in the neighbouring district. In a similar way, Alice and Casey explained that there was never any question that they consider schools other than those already attended by older siblings. In turn, having looked at several

schools with his parents, Leon decided to attend his local secondary school because he liked the convenience of its location only to change his mind two weeks before the start of term, opting for a short bus ride to a neighbouring area to be with the bulk of his primary school friends. Indeed, whilst some participants were excited about making the transition from primary to secondary school, the majority were worried about the prospect of being bullied. For instance, against the backdrop of her regular bullying at both pre-school and primary school, Cher's determination to stay with her primary friends meant that she 'waited in dread' to attend a local school with a bad reputation for bullying. In contrast, John abandoned plans to follow his circle of friends and went to the only other school that still had places when he discovered that his original choice was attended by two older girls who bullied him in the neighbourhood where he lived.

Yet whilst friendships, rivalries, bullies and siblings could steer participants choice-making within small local circuits of schools, a number of participants gave accounts of their primary to secondary school transitions in which the choices of peers were of little consequence. For instance, after Carl and his parents visited their local secondary schools, despite a reputation for being 'crap, shit', the fact that most of his primary friends also attended his local sports specialist school made little difference to Carl's decision to attend and pursue his lifelong aim of becoming a professional footballer. Similarly, several participants choose to take the combination of tests and interviews required for entry into the nearby City Technology College (CTC) which was described as being new, well equipped, having a reputation for success, and 'a school for smart people'. However, all but Mike were unsuccessful in making it through the selection process:

*'remembering it now it just seemed like commonsense and I didn't really say the right answers, they probably thought I was dumb but most people, it seems most people that get into CTC play an instrument' (John)*

*'T: It was a good school and it had its name for being good, like good results and stuff but I just didn't get in.*

*W: So how did you feel when you didn't get in?*

*T: I was a bit gutted at the time but looking back it was alright because I'm glad I came here now.' (Tristan)*

Mike's plans for a veterinary career meant that he set his sights on the CTC because of its strong science focus and 'felt great' after getting in. However, he gave up his place several

weeks prior to starting when his mum and step dad decided to move to a different city. Yet when his step dad failed to find work after several weeks, Mike's family returned and he attended the only secondary school with available places. In later explorations of years 9, 10 and 11, we examine the intensification of concerns about the links between school and future occupational selves which resonate strongly with Brown (1987) and MacDonald & Marsh's (2005) research. However, the accounts of both Carl and Mike suggest that such links can also be powerfully present as working class pupils negotiate their way through the educational marketplace. In turn, whilst John and Tristan's choices were not steered by such clearly defined ends, their decisions to apply for entry to their local CTC are consistent with the sense of difference/superiority they exhibited through their assignment to top sets in primary school. Moreover, at one level, steering away from friends and out of local circuits of schooling towards a selective school risks either failure to gain entry or failure to fit in where selected. However, whilst John's identification of the need for arbitrary pre-requisites of cultural capital (musical abilities) to gain entry counters suspicions that failure to get in is an indictment of ability, Tristan's feeling 'a bit gutted at the time' had dispersed in the wake of a secondary career of high achievements and assignment to top sets. Finally, Mike's narrative further highlights the ways in which the twists and turns of schooling careers were tied to facets of individual biographies beyond schools.

However, difficulties with 'fitting in' were of profound importance for both Gemma and Dan who successfully secured places in schools outside of their own localities. Indeed, having been moved up to top sets following unexpected success in her year 6 SAT's, Gemma had made a new and inseparable friend who had plans to follow her sisters to a prestigious girls school given that bullying, drugs, bad teaching and slow progress in other schools meant that 'you wouldn't get on in life'. Despite looking at several local schools with her dad and grandparents, Gemma made a last minute decision to make a daily bus ride of 30 minutes to be with her new best friend. In turn, she explained that after just a few days she knew that she had made the wrong decision:

*G: I don't know, I had this constant gut feeling if you know what I mean?*

*W: Can you try and expand a little bit more on that? What was that gut feeling about like?*

*G: I don't know, they were all quite snobby, they would always be like, I don't know, talking about, they talked down about the shops that I would go into or something like that, do you know what I mean? And they would be like oh I spent £100 on a top in River Island or something like that and I don't know, oh my dads got a new Mercedes and all that sort of*

*thing'*

After having 'stuck to her like glue' in the first few months of starting, the friend that Gemma had followed to secondary school drifted away and she got into a routine of feeling that she hated school and never wanted to go. During the summer holidays following her completion of year 8, Gemma couldn't face going back and her grandparents managed to arrange a place for her at the only school in the area with available places. Within this account we catch clear glimpses of a working class habitus confronting a middle class environment to which it is misaligned and like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Manifest and experienced at the level of a 'constant gut feeling', Gemma stumbles through 'I don't know's' and 'do you know what I mean's?' in a search for tangible aspects of class – where one shops, how much one spends, the car one's father drives – which testify to relational structures, distinctions and boundaries infused with hierarchy (snobbery, looking down), that call her into being as lesser other (Bourdieu, 1986). Indeed, this is a 'dialectical confrontation' between habitus and field which 'generates suffering' (Bourdieu cited in Ingram, 2011: 290), and as her positive orientation to schooling degenerates, her choice of secondary school ultimately becomes a bounded choice as she opts for reallocation to the kind of local, undersubscribed school that her friend had initially encouraged her to avoid.

In turn, Zac, Dean and Dan were the only participants for whom the choice of which secondary school to attend was not their own. Indeed, whilst Zac's family's relocation to another city just prior to starting secondary school meant that he went where places were still available, Dean lived in a relatively rural area where 'choice' was limited to the local state school or a private fee paying institution. In turn, Dan's mum insisted that he attended a school with a good reputation beyond the school nearest their estate which had a name for being 'hard' and 'rough'. Whilst Dan had wanted to follow his primary school friends to the latter, the fact that he knew just one other person attending the former meant that he 'got the nerves right up until the day before' starting, worried 'that people were going to start something'. Assigned to a separate tutor group to his primary school acquaintance, Dan not only described his peers as being 'completely different' to him, but the ways in which their bullying demanded that he develop a close friendship with another pupil rooted in a tough corporal stance which offered mutual protection:

*'where as I used to be from Northwall and they used to be from Hathely and stuff like that, they used to try and take the piss out of me because I was from Northwall and they're from different*

*ends and then I just ended up with a mate called Mark and no one would bother Mark cause if they had a problem with me they had a problem with Mark and if they had a problem with Mark they had a problem with me so that's when all that stopped but they were all proper snobby, pretty much snobby people. If you weren't wearing a nice named Nike pair of trousers, if you were wearing say a Hi-Tech pair of trousers they would rip the piss out of you all day and just terrorise you and throw stuff at you because they thought that they were hard and they would turn their nose up at you and that and obviously I didn't like that.'*

Whilst Dan's mum's control of the choice making process was an attempt to ameliorate the realities of his class position, in a similar way to Gemma, his subsequent failure to 'fit in' only served to reinforce and consolidate it. However, whereas Gemma's failure to fit in can be read as the result of inter-class differences, Dan's comments suggest that his was the result of intra-class differences. Indeed, alongside the fact that he continued to be assigned to bottom sets, the importance of the branded sportswear that set him apart from his peers is a central component of a particular working class subcultural style – 'Chav' (Hayward & Yar, 2006; Nayak, 2006; McCulloch *et al*, 2006; Archer *et al*, 2007). Examining the significance of such style within schools, Archer *et al* (*ibid*: 226-227) have found that whilst the consumption of quality sports brands provides 'a means for negotiating the representational violence of feeling 'looked down on' by society and within schools', this can hinge around the disparagement of other working class pupils unable to consume (generate social worth) in such ways because of their greater 'proximity to poverty'. Indeed, the aesthetics of class and poverty are powerfully intertwined in Dan's account, forming a vernacular for relatively privileged working class others which allows them to categorise, essentialise, and limit him through the stigmas they read off from his being. A particular constellation of class and poverty are cited through his being from 'Hathley' (a 'hard' and 'rough' council estate) rather than 'Northwall' (a working class neighbourhood); wearing 'Hi-Tech' trousers rather than 'nice' 'Nike' ones; and having to also don items of school uniform 'bought at Asda'. These fuel humiliations against which the only cultural capital Dan can generate to accrue minimums of security and dignity depend upon the cultivation and display of a 'hard', 'rough', hypermasculine bodily hexis rendered meaningful, authentic, and ultimately, successful through the very images of the social world he struggles against by coming to embody.

These accounts of working class young people's engagement with the process of choosing which secondary school to attend draws attention to the variegated ways in which their choices are structured and made. Indeed, whilst most had control over where they attended, the

importance of staying with primary school friends, avoiding bullies, or going to the same school as siblings meant that they choose within a local ‘circuit of schooling’ (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995: 52). However, alongside the importance of ‘fitting in’, a number of participants’ choose independently of peers, highlighting the ways in which both future occupational selves and a sense of superiority/difference could influence choice, steering several participants out of local circuits towards selective schools which carried the risk of either not getting in or not fitting in. Indeed, such choices not only highlighted the ways in which participants decisions could stall and how this could be dealt with and weighed against subsequent schooling success where it came, but that the peculiarities of wider individual biographies - specifically moving house – could either send choices off course or render choice a non-choice. However, successful deviations from local circuits of schooling attended by primary friends, weather willed by participants or parents/carers, carried heavy costs in terms of fitting in which could blunt the original purposes of such choice. In this respect, fitting in appeared to resonate with notions that it is about being with the ‘right kind of people’, with potential for being othered by both middle and working class peers where alternative criteria for choosing prevail. In the final instance then, the general importance of peers and friendships in the process of choosing was something which was carried over into and featured as a central and crucial thread of participants accounts of their secondary school careers.

### ***Summary.***

Taken together, this chapter offers glimpses into the ways in which participants’ primary educational experiences had begun to shape and steer them and their schooling careers in particular ways ahead of their secondary years. Indeed, what emerges from their accounts is the complex interplay between home, school, parents/carers, teachers, peers, and the correspondingly variegated and shifting ways in which participants are positioned socially and structurally within schools. In particular, it offers glimpses of class (being made) as a ‘structure of feeling’ that can involve injury (Thompson, 1963: 116; Sennett & Cobb, 1972) - phenomenologically hewn through encounters with schooling such as problems with schoolwork and learning, SAT’s, and/or sets. Moreover, whilst this was not felt by all, we nonetheless began to discern the beginnings of a quiet coming together of SAT’s, sets, and peer relations as a broad yet nascent social-structural container. In turn, whilst we have seen how participants appeared to read their parents/carers as valorising school, underpinning it as a ‘meritocratic’ good, we have also seen how careers could take shape within the wake of unsuccessful efforts by parents/carers to directly intervene within schools to steer them in a different direction. In relation to choice, class again powerfully present, with many taking



control of the process and opting to attend local schools where they would ‘fit in’. Yet for others, choice was less ‘straightforward’, involving ‘choices’ which stalled and/or risked not ‘fitting in’, with class surfacing within peer relations to blunt the original purposes of ‘choice’. In this respect, from the delicate initial overlapping of home and school through to the process of choosing which secondary school to attend, participants had already begun to experience schools in ways that transited with them into the latter years of their compulsory education, and it is to these layers of experience to which we now turn our attention.

# 8

## **The View From Below: Experiences of Secondary School.**

### ***Introduction.***

The complex unwinding of secondary schooling has formed the bulk of our long view of compulsory education, and we have in turn located this within the shifting ‘balance sheet of class struggle over educational goods’ (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995: 55). Young people’s schooling careers form part of this history, both in terms of their experiencing its fallouts and residues and in living through its thresholds. Yet their secondary careers would also have taken shape within a similar set of contexts and dynamics to those mapped out by education professionals. Indeed, in this chapter, whilst we continue to track layers of continuity and change that carried through the transition from primary to secondary school and their chronological pulling apart, we also unpick the latter’s distinctiveness: how the significance of peer relations appeared to swell, how the significance of what might follow school could creep in, and the continuing complexity of rolling intersections with facets of experience both within and beyond school.

### ***The Social Structural Terrain: ‘getting to know who’s who’.***

Beyond both Gemma and Dan’s struggles to fit into their respective secondary schools after steering out of local circuits of institutions attended by primary friends, for the remainder of participants, starting secondary school saw initial fears about bullying give way to worries about the large size of their new environments; having to learn new rules and procedures; adjusting to new subjects and teachers; and above all, getting to know new classmates. Yet in this respect, whilst participants tended to be divided into separate classroom-based ability sets for most subjects either immediately, at sometime during the first year, or at the start of the second year, tutor groups and some subjects such as art, music and PE continued to be mixed-ability. While this meant that there was both initial and ongoing scope for participants to ‘get to know’, orientate, and position themselves in relation to ‘who’s who’ within shared educational spaces, the majority sketched the contours of peer groups and relations through accounts of ability sets, describing a social terrain which was more divided and closely related to setting than it had been in primary school.

Indeed, whilst Matt, Tristan Alice and Macey were consistently assigned to top sets, John, Mike, Carl, Zac, Tim and Dean were assigned to a range of top, middle, and bottom sets for different subjects at different points in their careers, with the remainder of participants consistently assigned to middle (Leon), lower sets (Dan, Tam, Casey), or between the two (Gemma, Cher, Shelly). For those who experienced them, top sets were fast paced classes in which teachers did not check to see if pupils understood the content of lessons that were harder, more detailed, both pupil and teacher expectations were high, and there were exclusive school trips, and later, university taster days. Moreover, as Matt explained:

*'everybody knew that if you were in the higher groups that you could go on to do, to get high paid jobs and stuff that you wouldn't necessarily get if you were in the lower groups because you could go to university and basically you get more money, a nice house, a nice car and all that sort of thing.'*

In tracing the links between *being in* 'higher groups' and the likelihood of *becoming* someone who is university educated, well remunerated, and has a certain standard of living ('nice' house, car, 'that sort of thing'), Matt understands top sets to be important pre-requisites of mobility, articulating a clear linearity between education and future socio-economic self. Moreover, in contrast to earlier characterisations of pupils in upper bands and streams as pro-school conformists (Hargreaves, 1967; Willis, 1977), participants echoed Ball (1981), Brown (1987), and Mac an Ghaill's (1994) findings that whilst their scholastic positions and subsequent understandings of what school could offer brought them closer to its formal requirements in terms of work and behaviour, orientations were rarely fully normative. For instance, whilst participants explained that the intense nature of top sets meant that there was both less room for misbehaviour and that people generally 'listened more' and 'did their work', Dean suggested that one of the key distinguishing features of top sets was that pupils still 'mess around but they keep to the standard of behaviour and work standards'. In turn, for those who had experienced only middle and lower sets, their derogatory characterisations of top set pupils matched those charted in other work (Hargreaves 1967; Willis, 1997; Ball, 1981; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), with participants describing them as being 'keeners', 'nerds', 'dorks' and 'gorms' who were 'proper clever', 'brainy', had few if any interests beyond schoolwork, and strictly adhered to codes of dress and behaviour. Moreover, a number of accounts were also consistent with earlier studies in explaining that top set pupils were also more likely to be from middle class families:

*'Top sets would be all the really good, well-behaved children, from really posh families that would get on with their work and do what they were supposed to do in school.'* (Shelly)

*'C: The stuck-up girls and that would always try and be in the top for everything.'*

*W: So what do you mean by... these stuck-up girls then, what were they like?...*

*C: ...People from Holbury are all like that aren't they, they're all stuck up. And I have always tended to hang around in other places so they've always been like that, they're so much better because they're from Holbury. Daddy wants me to do so well, he wants me to go to university and have a great career.'* (Cher)

Whilst Shelly suggests that the pupils from 'really posh families' in top sets overlapped seamlessly with the formal (behavioural and academic) demands of her school, Cher's descriptions of 'stuck-up' top set girls from Holbury not only maps the distinction, distance, and superiority she perceives them as drawing from the hierarchy of sets on to a wider (geographical) hierarchy of class-based value and worth, but implicates the wants and wishes of parents ('daddy') in linear progressions through school, university, and on into 'a great career'. Yet at the same time, participants' also echoed earlier work through their characterisations of bottom sets and the pupils within them.

Indeed, besides being seen as slower paced classes in which pupils needed more help, participants both within and beyond bottom sets were united in suggesting that their distinguishing feature was that pupils embodied an attitude in which school and education held little value. For instance, whilst Tam was consistently assigned to bottom sets and Mike straddled the hierarchy with a bias towards them, they were nonetheless typical in explaining that 'the lower ones just don't want to learn anything, they just want to piss about', and that 'in bottom you had the people who didn't give a crap, they would just piss about and they wouldn't care'. In turn, whilst Dean described bottom set pupils as being bullies who 'didn't know many words', 'talk and act like thugs' and would 'pick on people who are clever and will get somewhere', a number of participants also described them as being 'Chavs':

*'The Chavy lot are often from quite rough families... [and] were usually in lower. [sets]'* (Zac)

*'the people I would call Chavs wouldn't be bothered with school, I don't know, not being too mean but they live on council estates and stuff like that because that's what they do and cause trouble'* (Tim)

Ball (1981: 49) reminds us that as social settings, schools are ‘made up of two worlds’ – a formal world of ‘teacher-pupil interaction, of schoolwork and discipline’, and an informal world of ‘social relationships between pupils, of friendship and social groups’. In this respect, descriptions of bottom set pupils placed the formal and informal worlds of schooling furthest apart. Not only are they defined by a lack of care and desire to learn, the *raison d’être* of their schooling – to ‘piss about’ – disregards the standards of behaviour that academic success demands. Yet parallel to this lack of positive school work ethic, their relationship with binary educational others – ‘people who are clever and will get somewhere’ – is defined by bullying and thugary which classifies them as uncultured, unknowing, primitive (they ‘didn’t know many words’), and forms a component part of their own immobility. Indeed, within Zac and Tim’s comments, bottom set pupils/‘Chavs’ are immutably fixed in their being. They do not simply ‘live on council estates’, it is ‘what they do’: they are synonymous with ‘causing trouble’ because it is the way of life on ‘council estates’ and within ‘rough families’. Indeed, as a pejorative label with which young people rarely self-identify (McCulloch *et al*, 2006), the derogatory connotations of ‘Chav’ appeared to be stowed primarily within participants use of the term to capture a particular constellation of behaviour/orientation to school rather than the aesthetic traits with which it is more typically associated (Hayward & Yar, 2006; McCulloch *et al*, 2006; Nayak, 2006). In this respect, smoking, truanting and hanging around in the streets/drinking in the evening were often placed alongside lack of positive school work ethic as key distinguishing features of ‘Chavs’. For instance, whilst Shelly was alone in citing defiance of school uniform, makeup and jewellery regulations as (aesthetic-come-behavioural infringements) characteristic of ‘the Chavy lot, which I suppose was my lot’, as the only other participant to associate themselves with the term, Cher explained that she had been:

*‘one of the ones who was always having a laugh and bunking lessons and stupid stuff. I wouldn’t call them Chavs, I would say they would be normal but obviously other people call us Chavs’.*

Recognising that her behaviour can be read by others through the lens of ‘Chav’, Cher’s awareness of the stigma the term carries leads her to disassociate the behaviour she describes from the weight of its meaning by suggesting it is inaccurate precisely because of the abnormality it implies. In a similar way, just as Zac appeared to separate his sharing the same educational spaces and engagement in the same misbehaviour as ‘Chavs’ by tying them to ‘rough families’, in discussing his experiences of straddling the setting hierarchy, Dean

suggested that at the bottom of the scholastic order the difference between him and other pupils was that ‘they, not like me not so much caring for work, they *actually* don’t care’ (original emphasis). Yet as a relatively high-achieving top set pupil, Macey used a similar behavioural inventory to identify the majority of her school as ‘Chavs’:

*W: What about Chavs?*

*K: Oh yes, you’ve got them, they’re the sort of popular people... it’s not like just 4 or 5 of them it’s like the majority of the school... If you drank and if you smoke then you are part of that sort of thing and if you don’t they just look down on you.*

*W: How would they be doing at school?*

*K: They’d bunk as well. They would smoke.*

*W: Why do you think they would bunk off?*

*K: Just can’t be bothered with education and stuff.’*

In contrast to the way in which Zac and Tim anchor and fix ‘Chavs in relation to their being from ‘council estates’ and ‘rough families’, Macey not only de-anchors and broadens the term to capture ‘the majority of the school’, but suggests that engaging in ‘Chav-like’ behaviour forms the basis of popularity within the informal world of school. In this respect, her suggestions that not being a ‘part of that sort of thing’ means being ‘look[ed] down on’ begins to resonate with work examining the ambivalence, costs, and losses which educational success can involve for working class pupils (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005; Reay, 2006; Ingram, 2009, 2011). In this respect, whilst behavioural characteristics associated with both ends of the scholastic hierarchy appeared to carry stigmas, in a wider way they formed part of the meanings through, within, and against which participants’ social structural positions were continually worked out. Yet as we go on to explore in further sections, participants accounts of their own experiences nearly always frustrated the rigidity of their accounts of ‘who’s who’.

### ***Years 7, 8 & 9: Coalescence & Rupture.***

#### ***- Intersections from Within.***

In a similar way to accounts of primary schooling, several narratives suggested that the importance of getting to know new people at the start of year 7 could overlap with other aspects of participants’ secondary careers to steer them in particular directions. Indeed, earlier we saw how bullying, subsequent fighting, and problems with schoolwork meant that Mike

was regularly in ‘bad moods’ and/or ‘argued’ with teachers, pushing him beyond notions of the ideal (able) and good (well behaved) learner (Youdell, 2006). In turn, following his family’s brief move to a different city and subsequent arrival at secondary school two months late, Mike explained that the importance he attached to getting to know his new peers quickly got him a ‘reputation’ with teachers for chatting and ‘mucking about’. In addition, although the writing skills that had previously frustrated him had improved, he explained that during years 7 and 8 he responded to difficulties with schoolwork by avoiding direct appeals for help:

*‘I found that it made you look like an idiot if you put your hand up so I never used to, I would find I would sit there and if the teacher came around I would be like oh what do I do here? Instead of putting my hand up I would wait until they came near me... I found it embarrassing’*

Whilst his subsequent lack of work did little for his reputation with teachers, in a similar way to Carl’s primary experiences, Mike not only found maths to be a relatively easy subject but his favourite because his work rate did not draw the attention of teachers:

*‘it was the fact that I knew I was good at maths, I knew it was something I couldn’t get yelled at for not listening and I knew that even if I didn’t listen all I had to do was read the question and I knew what I had to do’*

However, during a period in year 9 when Mike began to struggle with maths, he responded by taking the ‘easy way out’ and began truanting.

In a similar way, the fact that Casey had followed her sister to secondary school rather than the bulk of her primary friends meant that she also attached great importance to getting to know people which earned her a reputation for chattiness. In addition, like Mike she also struggled with work, explaining that:

*‘if I can’t do something and it’s not explained to me properly I won’t do it, I can’t do it, and like my teachers, there was like always somebody shouting out help, help, so she was going and coming back but I just thought I can’t be bothered to wait and that’s it, I wouldn’t bother.’*

Intersecting with this was the fact that her initial lack of friends meant that from the offset she had embedded herself within her older sister’s circle of friends, explaining that she was therefore exposed to smoking and truanting much earlier than the bulk of her peers. With the

exception of Art and PE, Casey explained that by year 8 she had become so bored at school that she had got into a routine of not going:

*'I was getting in the habit of not going, I think that's what it was for me, like waking up in the morning, oh I don't want to go, I don't have to go, no-one can make me go, I would just bunk and I think that was my problem because I knew I could do it so I carried on doing it.'*

Within both these narratives, initially fragile relationships with peers, problems with schoolwork/teachers, and truancy coalesce to reveal the subtle and nuanced ways in which similarity and difference often coexisted across participants' careers. Indeed, for Mike, the need to fit in with peers combines with a shift from experiencing and managing problems with schoolwork in terms of frustration and confrontation with primary teachers, to humiliation and avoidance ('you look like an idiot'/ 'I found it embarrassing'), generating in turn a similarly poor reputation with secondary teachers. Yet at the same time, this also translates into his management of problems with maths through absence – an 'easy way out' that negated the potential humiliation and getting 'yelled at' characteristic of other lessons in which he struggled. However, Casey's fitting in appeared to cause multiple problems, generating a poor reputation both within the classroom as she got to know her immediate peers, and beyond it as she also pulled closer to her sisters peers. Alongside this, assigned largely to bottom sets her learning identity appeared to be acutely fragile, needing close support ('if it's not explained... properly I won't do it, I can't do it') in an environment where the finite availability of teachers' time and attention tipped her into frustration and giving up ('I wouldn't bother'). Ultimately then, whilst her being in school appeared to hold little meaning, the dynamics of her fitting in offered an early alternative to her boredom through the development of a 'habit of not going'.

Yet in contrast to Casey's total response to boredom, Shelly's alienation from the rhythms and content of schooling meandered through intersections of her account in a different way. Indeed, having earlier related her general hatred of school to a widespread boredom which led her 'off-track', Shelly continued to describe herself as being one of the 'naughty ones'. For instance, in addition to starting to smoke on the first day of secondary school, she explained that whereas 'the posh people would wear the uniform', she 'would never ever wear the proper school shoes' and although 'make-up wasn't allowed until year 10 we'd wear it in year 7 and jewellery and everything'. Whilst this brought her into conflict with teachers, a further contributor was the fact that Shelly's alienation from schoolwork meant that in a similar way to Casey she began truanting from year 8. Yet within this, she also described the way in which



she found her secondary teachers to be ‘not very nice at all’, suggesting that her relationships with the majority of them had failed because:

*‘I won’t just sit there and let them shout at me, I’ll shout at them back, whereas if someone will come in and talk to me I’ll talk back, so if I’d ever done anything wrong there were those three teachers that wouldn’t be the sort of teachers that would come in and completely start bellowing so I would have a go back, they would come in and sit and have a rational conversation with you and you would sort it out that way and it would be done... whereas I’d get suspended if it was one of the other teachers because obviously they’d argue and then I’d start arguing and swearing and then they would suspend me so I used to prefer it that I’d only go to the lessons that I had those three teachers with’*

In many respects, this account suggests that Shelly is de-anchored from what Brown (1987: 75) describes as the ‘basic exchanges commonly operating in the school (i.e. compliance to obtain interesting and/or useful knowledge)’. Against the meaninglessness she attaches to schoolwork, her day-to-day experiences and encounters with the wider rhythms of school rules and connected interactions with teachers appear to be the only significant facets of the formal world of school that remain. In turn, Shelly’s narrative suggests that the dynamic between this and her being in the informal world of school pushes/exceeds the boundaries of these rhythms and interactions by upsetting the binaries of teacher/pupil, adult/child and women/girl to constitute her as an ‘impossible’ learner for the majority of teachers whose classes she was in turn unable to bear (Youdell, 2006). Along with smoking (from her first day) before the legal age, the donning of jewellery and makeup 3 years before permitted challenges the limits of acceptable expression of pupil-child-girl-femininity-sexuality, and is perhaps especially distasteful given Shelly’s earlier self-identification as ‘Chav’ (aesthetically vulgar and excessive). Whilst this generates conflict in its own right by pushing into the realm of adult-woman, so too does the way in which she demands parity with her teachers during and in dealing with confrontations. Indeed, while matching the ‘bellowing’ of her teachers is a refusal to passively defer to the authority typically stowed in their being adult-teacher-professionals to which pupils are other, Shelly’s preference for ‘rational conversation’ also constructs her as more adult than these teachers who are in turn rendered irrational, immature, and unprofessional. In turn, the three adult-teacher-professionals who share Shelly’s inclination to ‘sit’ and ‘talk’ further consolidate her as adult-woman. Moreover, besides ‘treating us the way that we wanted to be treated’, Shelly described the three teachers that she had got on with at secondary school as ‘know[ing] how to deal with different people sort of thing’. In the final

instance then, the fact that Shelly was much more likely to attend their lessons points to the powerful influence of teachers and avoidance of conflict upon her patterns of truancy.

*- Intersections from Without.*

Whilst there were similar crosscutting shades of complexity within Cher and Carl's early accounts of secondary school, their narratives were further refracted by crucial events within their family lives during year 9. For instance, while the experience of primary SAT's and assignment to middle sets had led Cher to 'give up' on school as she was 'not supposed to be doing that good anyway', being with 'complete div's' in middle and bottom sets at secondary school 'was better... because I could see there were a few people that were brighter than what they got' in year 6 SAT's tests. In addition, after her primary teachers' favouritism of 'people who were doing well', Cher found secondary teachers 'treated everyone more the same' and stopped to check if people understood explanations. In this respect, whilst those facets of primary schooling which had been most problematic for her were less so at secondary school, earlier frustrations appeared to have given way to degrees of acceptance and/or normalisation. Indeed, at one level, her being assigned to the same classes as 'complete div's' was 'better' because it was at one and the same time a shared experience determined by the fallibility of SAT's. Yet in a connected way, in contrast to the intra-classroom sets of the primary school where variations in curriculum and teacher-pupil interaction are highly visible, the more calibrated nature of educational differentiation at secondary school appeared render classrooms more coherent, egalitarian, and experientially normal in the context of less range. However, a further crosscutting factor was that having got into a 'routine of not caring' in primary school, Cher explained that she 'still had it in my head that I really couldn't be bothered', and in a similar way to Casey she truanted from lessons she found boring:

*'Certain lessons I hated them, I just didn't want to go because I didn't find them interesting... if I wasn't interested in something I thought there was no point in ever listening, I was never going to use it cause I hate it'*

In contrast to Mike's truancy as an 'easy way out' of problems with maths, Cher's account overlaps with the general sense of boredom underpinning Casey's 'habit of not going' whilst differing from it in the way that her own truancy was more specifically related to the perceived future use-value of particular subjects. Indeed, it was maths and English which she most 'hated', circularly animating her dislike on the basis that without interest there was both no point and no future relevance. Indeed, in Cher's case, the more 'strategic' nature of her truancy

mapped on to life-long ambitions to be a model or dancer whilst also stressing the need to have ‘something to fall back on’. This resonates with Brown’s (1987) ‘ordinary kids’ for whom total alienation from school/leaving with nothing was seen as too risky for occupational futures, underpinning their own alienated instrumentalism in which school was endured as a means to an end. Yet at the same time, accounts of Cher’s truancy push beyond this, suggesting that rather than a consistently uniform approach, her engagement with schooling was a segmented pattern of both strategic acceptance *and* total rejection. However, this pattern was further complicated by the fact that just as Cher had started year 9 her Nan was hospitalised after falling seriously ill and was not expected to recover. With her grandfather continuing to work as a long-distance haulier, Cher took on the full weight of domestic and childcare responsibilities, looking after both her younger sister and her Nan when she finally returned home towards the end of year 9. As a result, Cher missed the bulk of the school year, explaining that she ‘couldn’t really concentrate on school, school was just like the last thing in my head’. Whilst she disclosed her situation to some of her teachers, despite not blaming the remainder for what she described as their ‘sarcastic little comments’ regarding her rare and sporadic attendance, she explained that for her the crucial point was that:

*‘some teachers they just don’t want to be your friend, they’re just there to teach you. Other teacher’s they’re there to listen, teach, and be your friend and be there when you need them’*

In turn, Carl initially straddled the setting hierarchy at secondary school. Indeed, whilst he continued to struggle with written work as he had done in primary school, tending to ‘lose it’ and ‘strike back’ when teachers confronted him about his lack of work, Carl also continued to excel in maths and PE and was assigned to top sets for both whilst in bottom sets for most other classes. In explaining the different experiences of top and bottom sets, Carl explained that in the latter:

*‘they [teachers] try and help you too much, part of you actually thinks that they’re actually trying to say that you’re actually really dumb because they actually help you so much yeah, it’s partially like you just want them to get off your back’*

Moreover, Carl also suggested that being in top sets for both maths and PE provided a counterweight to such feelings and reminded him that he ‘wasn’t actually dumb’. In many respects then, Carl’s account is similar to Mike’s in that problems with schoolwork which had generated conflict with primary teachers were subtly rearticulated through the language of

humiliation and avoidance, differing in turn from Casey's account of the limited availability of her teachers. Indeed, for Carl, whilst help is too extensive and forthcoming, his account further unpacks not only the latent significance of help as a symbolic reference to inability ('dumbness'), but the ways in which this appeared to feed into efforts/desires to tap into 'help' in ways that were quiet and discreet - 'its *partially* like you just want them off your back'; 'I would sit there and if the teacher came around I would be like oh what do I do here?' (Mike). Yet at the same time, the fact that Carl's straddling of the setting hierarchy offset the feelings of 'dumbness' which loomed through his being in bottom sets highlights the way in which occupying multiple positions across the scholastic order could underpin learning identities and orientations that were characterised by dualism and hybridity – potentially shifting amalgams and balances of heterogeneity and contradiction. Indeed, having chosen to move to a different primary school after his teacher had moved him down a set in maths, Carl's accounts of secondary school suggested that being moved between sets continued to be an important issue for him. For instance, his continuing avoidance of homework so as to maintain a valued division between school and his own free time brought him into serious conflict with his year 8 maths teacher and he was subsequently reassigned to middle set. In addition, he described the way in which after his large bottom set science class was divided into 'people that actually did the work in one' class and 'people who thought it was a breeze in the park and just piss about in the other', Carl was pleased to find himself assigned to the former. However, he was later reassigned to the latter after swearing at a teacher who was 'always just on and on at you' about homework. Yet beyond this, the depth of his conflict with teachers meant that Carl was regularly placed in what he interchangeably described as 'seclusion' and/or 'isolation' - a small office where you 'just sit in there all day doing nothing'. Whilst Carl did not go into detail about these layers of conflict and events in his family life, he explained that after his father had been ill and eventually died in year 9, he was separated from his mum and taken into care, suggesting that this had been the main reason why the school did not permanently expel him during this period.

Taken together, these strands of data begin to highlight the complex and varying ways in which different layers and facets of experience could coalesce and come together within participants' accounts of secondary school. Whilst continuing to track these grades of intersectionality, from here we now move on to take a closer look at the ways in which participants were enmeshed within tensions between the formal and informal worlds of schooling.

### ***The Social Structural Middle Ground.***

A few months after Zac's family had moved to a different part of the country just ahead of his secondary schooling, the church to which his parents were affiliated sent the family on missionary work abroad. Whilst he attended a school which followed the English curriculum, Zac explained that for the next two years he was badly bullied by its largely North American intake. As a result, he found that 'work was never first thing on my mind. I was always worried about other things':

*'bullying got to me because I've always been really sociable so if I was bullied I would want to change so I could get mates, I mean I had mates but they were bullied as well, but then that often led to other things that I wouldn't have done if I wasn't bullied, like smoking and drinking and stuff like that.'*

Indeed, in a similar way to Dan, Zac's management of bullying drew him away from work towards misbehaviour which in turn brought him into conflict with teachers. However, at the end of year 9 when Zac had 'got used to the American culture' his family returned to the UK and he attended the nearest school with available places. In turn, Zac's not 'know[ing] how to act' meant that he experienced further bullying as he learned to 'adapt' to a culture that was 'all about fights and being hard', and with the exception of History, he was assigned to bottom sets in which he juggled schoolwork with his standing with peers:

*'one week I would feel like I'm in a good position, I don't really have anyone that hates me that much and I can knuckle down and work, it doesn't really matter and the next week something would happen between me and some other lads or something'*

In turn, earlier we explored John's account of getting to know 'who's who' at the start of his secondary schooling and the accompanying way in which he had gravitated towards 'the cleverest people' so as to 'get loads of help with my homework'. Following on from this, John's account of his secondary school experiences was initially marked by assignment to the majority of top sets, good behaviour and little conflict with teachers. However, John described the way in which during year 9, he had become dissatisfied with his circle of friends:

*'I didn't really see myself as a sociable kid, I just thought I was, I don't know because they were like the clever lot, maybe the nerdy lot or whatever they're called, and I just used to hang*

*around with them, because they didn't really do much in lunch or break times, they just sat there and ate their lunch and chatted'*

In turn, whilst he struggled to articulate how the change had come about, he recalled 'thinking well school's got to be like about education *and* having a laugh' (original emphasis), and that towards the middle of year 9 he had gone through a transformation with regards his standing amongst peers:

*'It was just weird like going from being really nerdy to being really funny to being kind of balanced, like go out [at night] and have a laugh but remembering to come back and do your homework'*

Nevertheless, by the end of year 9 John had been placed bottom on the year groups 'list of achievers', no longer completed his homework, and was moved down from several top sets including his favourite subject, maths. Taking both Zac and John's accounts together, the contours of their secondary careers emerge as powerfully defined by a zero-sum tug of war between the formal and informal worlds of schooling, whilst also drawing attention to the subtly variegated dynamics this can involve. Indeed, earlier we saw not only how top set pupils could be characterised in derogatory ways because of a perceived congruence with formal standards of work and behaviour, but the ways in which Macey suggested that engaging in 'Chav-like' behaviour (smoking, drinking, truanting, poor behaviour, and lack of positive schoolwork ethic) formed the basis of popularity. In this respect, whilst Zac's narrative again highlights the way in which the peculiarities of individual (family) biographies can powerfully influence the nature of schooling careers, it intersects with a constant effort to 'adapt' and maintain a 'good position' with peers from week to week: a prioritisation of the negation of bullying by getting the *right kind* of friends ('I mean I had friends but they were bullied as well') which not only encourages misbehaviour, smoking and drinking within a culture of 'fights and being hard', but simultaneously mitigates against 'knuckling down'. In turn, while Zac's account of the costs and losses involved in academic success/popularity stems largely from the bottom of the scholastic order, John's narrative suggests that the same tussle between work and peers (popularity) can also be powerfully at play for top set pupils. Indeed, John signals an awareness of the stigmas attached to his 'clever lot'/'nerdy lot' who engaged in mundane routines of sitting and chatting whilst eating lunch. This position is then transposed onto a division between school-for-'education' and school-for-'having a laugh' within which he attempts to strike a 'balance' by 'going

from being really nerdy to being really funny' that ultimately costs him his original position in the scholastic order. However, whilst this echoes findings from other work suggesting that working class pupils can often face 'impossible choices'... between popularity amongst the peer group and a successful learning identity' (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005; Reay, 2006: 301; Ingram, 2009, 2011), both Gemma and Mikes accounts indicate that they were much more able to occupy the social structural middle ground.

Indeed, having left the 'snobby' all-girls secondary school she had attended until the end of year 8, Gemma explained that she was 'much more relaxed' at her new school because 'they were my sort of people if you know what I mean'. Initially assigned to sets 'around the bottom', in a similar way to John, she described the way in which she 'envied' pupils who could balance 'work' and 'having a laugh':

*G: You would get the more like they keep themselves to themselves, really clever, think they're above the rest sort of people in the top top set and then you'd get the nice people but also the really clever people that you sort of envied in the second set and then you'd just get everyone else in the middle one and in the last, bottom set, you'd get all the naughty people who didn't care.*

*W: So why would you envy the people in that second to top set then, that's an interesting word to use?*

*G: Well because I always wanted to be like quite clever and respected at the same time.*

*W: Do you think people who were like that did have a certain level of respect?*

*G: Yes because they were able to have a laugh and do their work.*

However, as she quickly developed new friendships and moved towards the end of year 9, Gemma described the way in which living too far away from friends to go out at night meant she paid close attention to homework, became increasingly like second set pupils, and was eventually moved up into middle sets:

*'I was like coming out of my shell more, I was definitely not shy or timid anymore, I was sort of like people in the second set because as soon as I got home I would get on and do it, all my coursework was completed as quickly as possible but it was never rushed. I did take my time on it but I never used to go out on a night like some of my friends did but that's probably because I lived quite far away. I sort of found myself becoming more intellectually able'*

For Gemma then, whilst top set pupils are again seen as being ‘really clever’, they are also seen as being unsociable (‘they keep themselves to themselves’) and embodying an air of superiority (‘think they’re above the rest’). In turn, she not only presents cleverness as being only truly desirable and respectable when coupled with popularity (*not* keeping yourself to yourself/‘having a laugh’), but as the enviable settling of the ambivalence of costs and losses attained by the ‘nice’ but ‘really clever’ second set people who embody what those at the scholastic extremes respectively have *and* lack: cleverness and popularity, lived through a fusion of positive school work ethic and ‘having a laugh’. Yet whilst free of the bullying which powerfully limited Zac’s ability to strike a balance, Gemma’s accounts also differs from John’s in that whilst his reach for the middle ground involved socialising after school and a creeping inability to keep up with homework that saw him move down the scholastic order, Gemma’s successful completion of homework was central to striking a balance in which she moved up the scholastic order and came to bear an increasing resemblance to second set pupils.

In turn, Mike explained that after having ‘made myself a reputation’ via concerns to get to know people following his late arrival in year 7; ongoing difficulties with schoolwork/reluctance to ask for help/subsequent lack of class work; and his taking ‘the easy way out’ of difficulties with top set maths in year 9 by truanting, he managed to get things ‘back on track’ and ‘buckle down’. Indeed, following his problems in maths, Mike explained that he had been:

*‘dropped from doing my GCSE early, which is what I wanted to do. I wanted to do it early, I wanted to get it done and out of the way, and when I got dropped I was like no, I can’t believe I just did that. Obviously I knew that it was my mistake so I was like right I’ve got to get myself back on track, I’ve got to do this even more so I think that’s the reason I buckled down’*

However, getting himself ‘back on track’ led to Mike being made a school prefect at the start of year 10, and although he explained his acceptance of this assigned status on the basis of it being good for his C.V, it was potentially dangerous for his standing amongst peers given that ‘obviously if you’re a prefect you get singled out as one of the nerds’. However, Mike suggested that the fact he was a smoker and hung around with other smokers meant that he had ‘a foot in both sides’. In this respect, being too close to the formal demands and standards of schooling once again emerges as a risky and undesirable position. Indeed whilst infused with stigma (‘nerdiness’), Mike’s references to ‘sides’ and being ‘singled out’ points



to the way in which such a position/status can other and ostracise. Yet unlike Zac's 'changing', 'smoking and drinking' in order to get the right kind of friends to avoid bullying, in many respects, whilst Mike set out from such a position, he also explained that the potential for him to be 'singled out' as a 'nerd' was offset by the fact that like him, many people 'started going serious' and 'buckled down' when beginning their GCSE's at the start of year 10.

### ***'Buckling Down'.***

#### ***- SAT's & GCSE's.***

Indeed, having to take SAT's at the end of year 9 and begin preparing for GCSE's from the start of year 10 meant that this was a particularly significant time for participants. Whilst Cher's Nan's illness and Casey's truanting meant that neither of them completed SAT's, Carl and Alice were now alone in continuing to explain that SAT's were unimportant given the overarching importance of final GCSE examinations at the end of year 11. Indeed, in a similar way to accounts relating to primary SAT's, many more participants suggested that those in year 9 were an important lynchpin between ability, setting, and the potential outcome of GCSE examinations. In turn, whilst those in lower sets appeared to attach less importance to SAT's, Dan unpicked this kind of approach to them by explaining that:

*'you were alright if you got a high level, you were fine, but if you got a low level it would be funny, like you would walk up to one of your mates and you'd just have to say it just like a joke, because if they come out with like I got like a 4 or a 3 you would say I got a 1 and then don't get me wrong, you would feel fucked off about it but you just had to laugh it off'*

Earlier we saw how Dan's account of being in bottom sets not only meant that he 'always felt down' and questioned the 'point of doing work', but the way in which he tied this sense of his scholastic being to his being a 'bad learner' – 'I guess that's why in senior school I played up as well'. In turn, we explored the way in which his being bullied at secondary school underpinned the development of a tough hypermasculine bodily hexis that dominated his being in school. In relation to year 9 SAT's, Dan's comments suggest that within all this, a constitutive part of his being in school involved complex attempts to make some kind of virtue of necessity amid the interpenetration of the formal and informal worlds of school. Indeed, he outlines a presentation of self through which he tries to dodge the full weight of the humiliations stowed in his SAT's results by publically denying their importance through

trivialising jest, suggesting in turn that the privacy of ‘feel[ing] fucked off’ was more tolerable. In this respect, we momentarily glimpse the way in which experiential encounters with formal school processes can provoke, rejoin with, and bolster a complex *lived* response which, in this instance, involves projecting and embracing distance and independence from/disregard for the purposes of the educational project. Within this, just as Dan’s tough corporeal stance involved embodying the very images of the social world through which he was bullied – a ‘hard’ and ‘rough’ way of being hewn from ‘proximity to poverty’ and the council estate – his lived response to year 9 SAT’s also renders him intelligible to others as an educational/behavioural ‘Chav’ who was ‘not bothered about education’.

Yet whilst important in their own right, the significance of year 9 SAT’s was more routinely and closely tied to the ultimate importance of final GCSE examinations. For instance, John explained that ‘if you didn’t do well in the SAT’s you wouldn’t go into a high group and you wouldn’t have a good chance of passing your GCSE’s’. Indeed, the majority of participants were quick to describe the final two years of secondary schooling in which they began and eventually sat their GCSE’s as a period of intense pressure. Whilst Macey recalled that in the lead up to year 10 teachers ‘went on and on about how it was going to be so much harder’, Tim explained that there was generally ‘a lot of pressure, a lot of pressure from people saying you’ve got to do well as it’s the rest of your life’. In this respect, for many, the pressure surrounding GCSE’s was primarily linked to the need to secure 5 A\*-C’s as pre-requisites for entry to Further Education and/or employment:

*J: I know I’m going to get 5 but if I didn’t, I just thought that’s the basic minimum of what everyone should get.*

*W: The 5 A\*-C’s is the basic minimum?*

*J: Yes, for college and obviously to show that you’re not just a trolley pusher’ (John)*

*‘you need 5 C’s or above to pass to college but I know you have to have English, Maths and Science as well so because I don’t think I got maths [C or above] I just think oh I’m not going to get a proper GCSE now’ (Macey)*

Whilst these accounts once again trace links between SAT’s, sets, GCSE success, and linear ties to the tone and texture of the ‘rest of your life’, this is experienced and expressed as an explicit ‘pressure’ indicative of a heightened sense of what is at stake.

Indeed, Brown (1987: 34) reminds us that it is in the later stages of schooling that a sense of

future ‘occupational identity lies at the heart of the individual’s life-line between childhood and adulthood’, and although many participants did not have a calibrated sense of the occupations they wanted to pursue, all but Zac, Dean and Casey had plans to enter some kind of FE, with several also aiming for HE. Yet within the comments above, whilst John and Macey both consider 5 A\*-C grades to be the ‘basic minimum’ for progression to ‘college’, Macey suggests that grades that fall below this threshold are not considered to be ‘proper’ GCSE’s. Moreover, for John, an assortment of such grades which together fail to meet the ‘basic minimum’ demonstrate that you are fit only for categories of work such as ‘trolley pushing’. In this respect, schooling was seen to play a determining role in occupational futures both in terms of making it to college and, in a connected sense, avoiding a life of unskilled manual labour. Indeed, with the exception of Zac, Dan, Shelly and Casey, as participants entered the final stages of their schooling careers they were increasingly engaged – albeit with different degrees of success – in efforts to ‘swot’ (Brown, 1987) for their GCSE’s in ways which often involved shifts and changes of direction in relation to prior orientations to school.

#### *- Post-School Plans<sup>24</sup>.*

Having always placed greatest importance on the trumping power of GCSE’s, Carl explained that he ‘knew they were more important than the SAT’s so I just tried so hard’. Having settled into his foster family following the death of his father, Carl regained a focus on his secondary schooling and, with the help of a National Support Worker, what would follow:

*‘I needed those GCSE’s to get into college so they were important to then obviously now I have got to do a HND Higher National Diploma in sport... and I want to go to university to do a teaching degree to become a PE teacher’*

Indeed, whilst he had originally chosen to attend his sports specialist secondary school in order to pursue his lifelong aim of being a footballer, Carl explained that during the upheavals of year 9 he had come to see this goal as unrealistic. Yet set against a backdrop of absent or fragmented and uncertain routes into traditional male working class jobs (O’Donnell & Shape, 2000), within Carl’s account of his subsequent plans, it is possible to discern shades of a reconfigured working class masculine way of being/becoming in which education is key. Indeed, sport, and football in particular, can play ‘a strong and prominent part in ‘masculinity’ and male identity’ (*ibid*: 139), and in working class terms, becoming/being a PE teacher not

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<sup>24</sup> Note that Carl, Dean, Mike, Leon, Tim, John, Alice, Matt, Gemma, Macey and Tristan had all been accessed via a list of pupils selected for ‘triage’ – by virtue of their being on the D/C borderline for one or several subjects – to boost them into the all-important 5 A\*-C GCSE yardstick of educational ‘standards’.

only offers a degree of continuity with the tough, durable, physically competent body of the ‘traditional’ male worker, but also comes closer to the relative security of traditional notions of the ‘job for life’. However, the crucial point is that like other participants, Carl must traverse the uncertainties of the education system upon which all this hangs, with the pending results of his buckling down for GCSE’s marking the first step.

Indeed, similar themes of uncertainty were also subtly present within Dean, Mike, and Tim’s accounts of both buckling down and their post-school plans to enter the armed forces. For instance, whereas Dean had been preoccupied with the fact that he missed his parents at primary school; had always avoided homework so as to maintain a valued division between school and home; and had often described himself as being an ‘unmotivated’ pupil, he explained that ‘the GCSE’s to me were like important’:

*‘There was a very different point of view for me in year 10 because it was like I actually started to do coursework and things which were going towards my GCSEs... which was very serious for me’*

Whilst he saw entering the army after finishing school as a ‘safe bet for teens who don’t know what they’re doing’, the fact that Dean had not yet secured himself a place meant that he joined Macey, Cher and Leon in suggesting that no matter what happened after GCSE’s, there was a need to have left school with ‘something rather than nothing’ so as to have ‘something to fall back on’. In this respect, whilst the army again offers entry to a thoroughly male (physical) world of work, Dean’s choice nonetheless remains a ‘bet’/gamble within a broader context of uncertainty for which successfully buckling down at school might provide a degree of insurance. Yet in turn, like Carl’s post-school plans Mike’s were more calibrated and specified than Dean’s and remained tied to the lifelong desire to be a vet which had earlier seen him seek selection for a nearby CTC. However, his projected future again hinged upon securing 5 A\*-C’s which he did not actually expect to achieve on his first attempt, and an effort thereafter to secure entry to the army ‘for four years’ to complete the more apprenticeship-like training to ‘be a vet’:

*I will do Animal Management [HND] but I will also do retakes so I can get the five [A\*-C’s] because the course I’m doing in Fardown is either a one-year or a two-year and I want to go in the army at 18 to do veterinary but when I went to see the bloke to see how old I’ve got to be to go in there he’s oh it’s better if you come in with a diploma or a certificate in something to*

*do with it so alright I'll get a [Higher] National Diploma but obviously I want to do my National Diploma in Fardown so I'm going to come here [his schools 6<sup>th</sup> form] for a year, do my retakes and then I want to go to Fardown for a year, hopefully do my diploma and then go to the army for four years and be a vet.*

Whilst education remains key to Mike's occupational future, the army appears to offer the most simple and direct route to it. Indeed, despite the fact that both his expected failure to 'get the five' and his army career advisors suggestion that that its 'better' for applicants to have 'a Diploma or a certificate' highlights the way in which this route is also full of uncertainties, paid army training nonetheless negates the entry requirements, time, expense, and insecurities of the HE system.

Yet in contrast to the ambient shades of uncertainty within these accounts, Tim was explicit about the way in which his buckling down and development of career plans were linked to the early signals of economic recession. Indeed, whilst Tim had been largely assigned to middle sets for the duration of his schooling career, he explained that at secondary school he was 'chatty, class clown', 'didn't complete homework sometimes', and described the way in which going into year 10 he found himself 'being a bit more lazy'. Yet further on in the year Tim had set his sights on becoming an RAF pilot and began to buckle down, explaining that 'for a high calibre job, if you want it, 5 A\*-C's, you need that as a pilot and two A-levels, so that's what was always from year 10, that was what I needed to get kind of thing'. However, he also explained that this intersected with 'the things about jobs and the economic crisis... it definitely influenced me to go to college because I needed them for the job I want to get when I'm older':

*'everyone's saying to you and you're saying it to yourself you've got to do well in them to get somewhere nowadays, you need GCSE's,... children that didn't get any GCSEs and good grades and stuff, I don't know if that's going to happen anymore kind of thing'.*

Similarly, whilst John's attempts to balance 'education and having a laugh' had seen him placed bottom of the year groups 'list of achievers', no longer complete homework and moved down from top set maths, he explained that the latter had been the tipping point after which he had regained a tighter focus on 'education' given that, in a similar way to Mike, he had also lost the chance to do his GCSE early. Moreover, whilst he did not have specific occupational plans, John's desire to secure the 5 A\*-C GCSE's grades needed to study A levels was also explicitly set within the developing context of recession.

*'I just knew that I needed to pass to go on to Sixth Form, I didn't want to go out and get a job yet because I didn't think there were many jobs out there and I would rather stay on and become, I don't know, kind of more knowledgeable I suppose'*

Taken together, both Tim and John's comments begin to suggest that for some, on the cusp of the current cycle of economic bust, the dynamics between economy and education gave greater urgency to the need to credentialise. Indeed, so strong is Tim's sense that you not only need GCSE's but need to 'do well in them' to get 'somewhere nowadays', that he suggests the alternative outcome may now become a thing of the past. In turn, whilst John 'needed' (and expected) to gain the passes necessary for Sixth Form, he suggests that immediate entry to the labour market was unviable, contrasting the relative emptiness of 'out there' with 'staying on' to at the very least become more 'knowledgeable'. Yet in contrast to the open-ended nature of John's plans to study for A Levels, Gemma, Alice, Macey and Matt had clear plans to take the traditional and established academic route through A Levels, university and on into professional jobs. Whilst both Gemma and Alice tied their respective plans to become a health care professional and English teacher to the uncertainties of their pending GCSE results, Macey and Matt's accounts of desires to be a journalist and forensic scientist did not contain any such uncertainty. In this respect, unlike Alice, Macey and Matt's consistent assignment to top sets for the duration of their schooling, whilst Gemma had only worked her way up into middle sets ahead of her GCSE's, Alice had experienced problems with schoolwork and learning towards the end of her secondary schooling which had undermined the certainty of her success. However, whilst these accounts offer insights into the various ways in which approaches to the final stages of secondary schooling could involve degrees of projection into a future following its completion, as we now go on to examine, other accounts of nearing the end of school were of an altogether different flavour.

### ***Early Exits & U-Turns.***

#### ***- Finishing Early.***

In contrast to the ways in which years 10 and 11 could mark turning points at which many participants sought to buckle down, both Shelly and Dan's GCSE's were over almost as soon as they had begun. Indeed, Shelly explained that whilst her school wanted her 'gone' because of her truancy, conflictual relationships with teachers, and a general lack of schoolwork, she had still done nothing to warrant permanent exclusion from school. In turn, whilst Shelly

recounted how her parents had continued to always attend parents evenings and ‘just wanted me to buckle down and get on with it’, after years of encouragement, arguments, and groundings, she explained that by year 10 they had ‘had enough of it’ and supported her schools offer of a place on an under-16 college placement for year 11:

*‘I got offered the under-16 college placement for year 11 so I took that straightaway because I couldn’t wait to get out of school and I don’t know, I didn’t really do, I just had a free year then in year 10, I just did what I wanted because I knew I didn’t have to revise for my GCSEs or anything because I wasn’t going to be there so I just kind of got a fun year’*

Whilst Shelly described leaving as having been the best thing about school, despite her initial enthusiasm for the hairdressing course she was to begin at college, her assignment to a class of second year students meant that she was unable to fully participate and engage with the course and left near the end of her first year. Although she felt angry that the scheme had not taken her ‘seriously’, whilst reflecting on the fact that she had left school with nothing and since completed a childcare course that had failed to lead to employment, Shelly explained that she wished she had ‘concentrated more [at school] and got exam results and could have got a job’. Yet similarly, for Dan who was still managing the threat of bullying with a tough corporal stance, moving into year 10 meant that he ‘felt like I was a big person in the school. I used to think as soon as I am in year 11 no ones going to even try and touch me’. However, just a few weeks into year 10, Dan was both permanently excluded and arrested for criminal damage to school property and began attending a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) soon after. Although he had ‘always hated school’ and wanted to be ‘out’, Dan explained that while his dad had always been disappointed with his behaviour/performance at school, in the final instance it was for his mum (who had obligated him to attend a school beyond the one nearest their estate) that he felt most concern:

*‘I was thinking yes I’m thrown out now, I wanted to go back there but I didn’t, like I wanted to go back there so I could say to my mum like I didn’t get thrown out of school, but I got thrown out and that was the best thing that could have happened with me getting thrown out of that school because even my mum she said oh for after about half a year of me being at PRU she said she was so glad I got kicked out of that school and she wishes that she had never put me in it really’*

Indeed, whilst Dan went on to explain that teachers at the PRU were not only ‘sound’, but that he had been able ‘to sit down and have proper conversations’ with them because they

were ‘so used to being around naughty kids’, he also explained that he was ‘beginning to do good and my mum saw the difference as well, that’s why she was so glad that I got thrown out of Hathely’. Yet like Shelly, Dan also lamented the fact that he had not ‘got anything out of school’, and that subsequently, all he had ‘to his name’ was the Level 1 NVQ in Literacy he had gained since attending the KTS centre where he was interviewed. However, beyond wishing that he had been able to attend the secondary school nearest his estate where everybody had been ‘in the same sort of boat as me,... from the same area’, whilst Dan would also have changed the way in which ‘the proper posh boys... went on’ at him at school, in the final instance he blamed himself for the contours of his schooling career, suggesting that he ‘just used to make it worse. Even though they were driving me, it was putting me in bigger situations by doing them’.

Yet whilst Shelly and Dan’s early exits from school were the most complete and abrupt, similar intersections between facets of prior experience, the efforts of parents, and subsequent expressions of blame and regret were present within Zac and Casey’s accounts of finishing up at school. For instance, following Zac’s attendance of a local branch of army cadets after his family returned from their missionary work abroad, like Dean, Mike and Tim, by the start of year 10 he had decided to join the armed forces. Yet rather than buckling down at school, in the final instance, his early offer of a place in the army during year 11 intersected with the ongoing management of his bullying/standing with peers to draw him even further away from schoolwork:

*‘what didn’t help was the fact that the job that I wanted in the army didn’t require any GCSEs at all and before my exams started I already knew that I had got a place,... I was so sure I would stay in the army’*

Moreover, Zac explained that whilst his parents wanted him to do well at school and encouraged him to work hard, he had also been in constant trouble at home following phone calls from teachers and that in a similar way to Shelly’s parents, ‘towards the end they just let me sort of do it [what he wanted] because they didn’t think their encouragement was sort of doing anything’. However, whilst Zac ‘couldn’t wait to leave school’ because ‘like everybody else in school I thought it would be easier out of school’, he had been very unhappy in the army and left just a few months after starting. Despite his subsequent regret about leaving school with just a few GCSE’s below the A\*-C threshold, unlike Shelly and Dan, the reality of Zac’s hatred of school stayed any wish to do it all differently – ‘I don’t think I could do it any



differently cause I couldn't stand it'. Yet for Casey, there was a clear wish to 'just go back and do it all again'. Indeed, having begun to truant just a few months into year 7, Casey explained that despite her mum's best efforts, by year 10 she had only very seldom attended school and that like both Shelly and Zac's parents, her mum had also had enough:

*'I think after that certain amount of time my mum just gave up and she thought I've tried everything, I've been to the school, tried and nothing's happening so she just let me stay home. My mum tried her hardest, she went to the school all the time saying if Casey's not in ring me and they didn't bother doing it so mum just gave up'*

Yet whilst Casey avoided permanent exclusion and was entered for several of her GCSE exams, she recounted how in the end, the weight of the not sitting them was subsumed within a broader set of concerns that had gathered a momentum of their own:

*'I was a bit like shit because I thought all my friends are going to be doing their GCSEs and have good jobs and I won't have nothing because I haven't bothered to do it but at that point I wasn't really bothered about my GCSEs because I was getting in trouble out drinking all the time and then a month later I got locked up'*

However, whilst these threads of data highlight the varying ways in which events and experiences could coalesce to steer the final stages/outcomes of careers even before they had run their course, in the following accounts, we explore how several participants were engaged either in efforts to shift careers in a different direction, or precarious attempts to continue managing a balance between schoolwork and having a laugh.

#### *- U-Turns.*

At the height of her Nan's illness Cher recalled thinking that she would 'probably never go back' to school. Yet as her Nan recovered and her Grandfather was able to retire and take on the domestic and caring duties that Cher had been managing, she attempted to refocus her attention on school:

*'I don't know, it all just kicked in like oh my god I'm going to leave school with nothing. I'm going to be like my mum. I don't want to be like that... My Nan was saying come on Cher you need to sort out what you want to do... I just thought at least if I get some GCSEs it's better than coming out of school with nothing so I did try, I tried hard but it's hard to still obviously*

*with all that in your background it's still hard to go home and try and revise and get it all done in a short amount of time as well as having to think about everything you've been through'*

Having missed most of year 9, by the middle of year 10 Cher was regularly attending classes with the help and support of the two friends who had remained close throughout her absence. Whilst the remainder of peers failed to fully understand her absence, those teachers who made 'sarcastic little comments' about her absence and to whom she had felt unable to disclose her situation led her to be strategic about which GCSE's she studied for, overlapping in turn with her initial strategic engagement with truancy on the grounds of a subjects perceived future use-value. Indeed, whilst she explained that 'it was only the teachers that I was close to that were willing to put in the time', the 'sarcastic' ones:

*'just sort of handed me all the work and said well this is what you need to learn and I would be like oh my god, like in science, this is what you need to learn and that's why there is no chance am I doing that at GCSE because I am never going to be able to learn that'*

In turn, having been assigned to bottom sets since primary school and continuing to manage her undiagnosed dyslexia in a way which generated conflict (for which she had been assigned to an in-house 'special unit' for 'disruptive pupils' in her final year of primary school), Tam explained that 'GCSE's shat me right up'. Like many participants, this was bound to fears about the relative consequences of GCSE results - 'I want to do well, I want to go out and get a proper job, go to college and not be like a tramp sat in the road begging just because I mucked about in school'. Indeed, Tam explained that whilst she had loved 'mucking about' and 'having a laugh' at school, anxieties about the final outcome of her schooling led her to begin adjusting her behaviour:

*'It was just getting too stupid. I would be in school one day and out for the rest of the week, it was just stupidity and so I thought forget it, you may as well just get your head down, do what you have got to do'*

However, despite describing the way in which Tam felt she subsequently 'progressed more because I was getting more help because I was being sensible and not messing about and stuff like that', she also explained that ultimately, the change had come too late and that she was 'gutted' with the 'crap' GCSE results she went on to achieve.

## ***Parents & Teachers.***

### *- Home & School.*

In a similar way to accounts of primary schooling, difficulties with homework and/or its non/completion continued to form a significant lynchpin between home and school. Indeed, before secondary school, we saw not only how difficulties/non-completion could interact with problems with schoolwork and learning, limitations in parents/carers abilities to act as educators at home, and the maintenance of a valued division between home and school, but how failure to complete homework could also generate/deepen conflict with teachers. Whilst these narratives continued to line accounts of secondary school, the ‘pressure’ of GCSE’s and the tendency to ‘buckle down’ for them meant that with the exception of Dan, Shelly, Casey & Zac, efforts to complete homework increased as the remainder of participants moved through the years. However, whilst its greater importance meant that non-completion could often carry sterner short-term penalties in the form of detentions, its increased difficulty also meant that more parents were increasingly limited in their ability to help out at home. For Instance, as a top set pupil who was Fast-Trackd in several subjects, Matt explained that by years 9 and 10 his parents were unable to assist with what had increasingly come to resemble A Level work. In turn, Mike described how his mum:

*‘would start trying to help me with my English, she would try and help me with my science. I knew if it was maths I knew she would be able to help me because she’s good at maths so I knew I would get help in that but I think it’s the fact that I knew she couldn’t help me as much because she wasn’t learning what I was learning’*

Whilst Macey was able to call on an older sister for help with her homework, Gemma explained how her ‘granddad went out with me to W. H. Smith one time and bought like all the books that I needed for my GSCE’s and then if I got stuck I would look in them’. In turn, Leon described how he would often approach ‘the Learning Support people’ at break times or after school – ‘I couldn’t do it, I don’t think my mum and that, they didn’t really understand it either so I went in there’. Yet besides fuelling conflict with teachers and the potential to slip behind with schoolwork, the circular problems of conflict, schoolwork and homework could also go on to form a component part of parents evening reports.

Indeed, in a similar way to accounts of primary schooling, most participants explained that their parents had continued to regularly attend parent’s evenings at secondary school.

However, whilst the death of Carl's dad, Cher's grandmother's illness and Gemma's staying with elderly grandparents while her father made long-distance haulage trips meant that their parents/carers attendance was/became more sporadic, the extent of Casey's truancy meant that her mum's contact with the school had shifted on to an altogether different terrain from year 8. Yet beyond the accounts explored in the last section, whilst Tim, Matt and Tristan explained that reports were consistently positive, for the remainder they were often blends of 'positives and negatives', with 'chattiness', poor behaviour, and lack of homework/schoolwork being the most common of the latter. In turn, alongside SAT's results, participants explained that there were often (combinations of) rewards and sanctions attached to parents evening reports in the form of 'praise', favourite meals, pocket money, 'trouble at home' and groundings, with several also describing their subsequent strategic approach to parents evenings. For instance, whilst Mike explained how he would 'mess around completely and then go oh parents evening in three weeks, alright get all my work done, all my coursework handed in and everything done', both Leon and Macey described how:

*'I wouldn't always tell them that there was one on until the school rang up and said how come you didn't come,... if you were messing about in class then you wouldn't want them to say to your parents that so I would only book it for the ones that you were good at, you were getting on good with, to make you look better' (Leon)*

*'you used to pick who you wanted to see so I used to pick the decent subjects, never used to do PE,... I never used to really do RE' (Macey)*

#### *- Teachers & Teaching.*

Earlier accounts of primary schooling in which both Carl and Dan felt that they had been overpoliced by their teachers were echoed within John and Mike's accounts of secondary school. However, whilst the former explained how he had reacted to a particular teachers tendency to 'walk into the lesson and look straight at me' by annoying her and making her life hell', the latter concluded his experiences of being 'watched carefully' in anticipation that he would 'be trouble' by suggesting that 'I got that a lot, but because I buckled down in year 9, in year 10 the teachers were oh he's a good student. I started to be a prefect'. Yet at the same time, teachers' perceptions of pupils were also seen as continuing to matter in relation to favouritism. Indeed, as had been the case in primary school, Macey articulated her grievance with teacher partiality by stating that 'I'm not saying I wanted to be their favourite, just like to be treated fairly'. Indeed, whilst Alice suggested that favouritism could determine who

answered questions and who received help within individual classes, Leon pointed to a broader kind of favouritism in relation to sets, describing how top set maths pupils ‘always got to go on bowling’:

*‘it was a bit like people who were good at it [maths] would go which I didn’t think that was fair, they should pick people from who were not so good at it but who tried and improved from what they were’.*

Moreover, in exploring his own experiences of being a non/favourite, Matt suggested that teacher favouritism was about not getting a ‘look in’:

*‘In this school teachers do have their favourites and if you’re not one of the favourites you don’t necessarily get a look-in ... Maybe [I was a favourite] in IT or something like that because I was always quite gifted at IT and quite gifted at maths and always really enjoyed science ... [but] you sort of got annoyed about it, thinking well they shouldn’t have their favourites, they should be open to everybody’*

In turn, both Tristan and Matt’s accounts suggested that they were subsequently aware of the strategic importance of obtaining/retaining favour with teachers. For instance, explaining why it was so important that he did well in his year 9 SAT’s, Tristan suggested that whilst ‘even if you’re not you still want people to think that you’re clever and doing good’, this was primarily because he felt that teachers ‘tend to care more and might be more friendly to the clever people, if that makes sense’. Yet alongside this emphasis on the significance of ability in retaining teachers’ favour, Matt gave primacy to the importance of behaviour, suggesting that ‘as long as you got on with them they got on with you’, and that ‘if you give them any hassle then they wouldn’t get on with you, you would have a hard time getting anywhere’:

*‘if you were good in their lessons and you did all they asked, if you had any troubles you could get help afterwards and they wouldn’t necessarily give help if people were prating around and messing about. If you scratched their back they’d scratch yours sort of thing’ (Matt)*

Moreover, whilst Matt felt that this all revolved around the contractual nature of teachers help, Shelly saw the lines of division/prioritisation this opened up as feeding into a situation in which some pupils were subtly abandoned:

*‘to me they didn’t seem like they [teachers] cared. They would just let you do, that school let’s you do what you wanted to do... People that wanted to do work they’d care about and the others instead of helping them and encouraging them to try and learn they’d just go alright then do what you want and leave you to do what you want’ (Shelly)*

Indeed, whilst Shelly at one level suggested that ‘the rules need to be stricter and more consequences’, she also felt that being ‘strict in one way’ needed to be balanced by teachers being ‘more on the level’:

*‘[to] be like a teenager, and because you always found that it was the younger ones that you know on the level they respected you, they knew what you were about, they would know what made you angry and they would just try and avoid getting to that point of shouting at you so that you didn’t get pissed off with them sort of thing. I would much rather sit in a classroom with someone that’s going to talk to me than with someone that would shout at me’*

Indeed, shouting was one of the things that participants appeared to dislike the most about teachers, and along with Shelly’s (earlier) suggestions that it could provoke similar responses from pupils, many echoed Dean’s sentiment that ‘constant shouting’ indicated that a teacher ‘could not control a class’. Yet beyond this, just as teachers’ shouting could be seen as provocative, like Shelly, both Mike and Macey suggested that teachers’ failure to adequately enforce rules and consequences could have a similar effect, highlighting the way in which it was most often the inconsistency of teachers attempts to discipline and control pupils with which participants took issue:

*‘They let you off too easily... like instead of like saying don’t do it again and saying don’t do it again and then saying if you do it again you will get a detention, if they just start off with that then maybe I would have listened and the others would have listened more’ (Mike)*

*‘Like maths, my maths teacher, she’s good at maths but we had loads of really naughty kids in our class so when they used to just shout back at her or muck about and stuff she wouldn’t just send them straight out she would be well I’m giving you another chance and if you mess this up you will get sent out and then they will have their other chance and she still won’t send them out’ (Macey)*

Yet many participants also disliked the fact that teachers could sometimes be lacking in basic standards of courtesy. For instance, whilst Alice recounted how her maths teacher ‘was really

rude, he would never call you by your name, he would just say you boy, you girl', Tam discussed teachers' rudeness in terms of an unreasonably strict approach which could again fuel circularly negative pupil-teacher relations corrosive to mutual respect:

*'I just think they are rude. They don't listen and I think it's just blatant rudeness... They're too strict, like if you're late for class and you try and tell them the explanation they would be like no, detention. But if you listen to what I'm going to say to you then maybe you might actually understand do you know what I mean... I would be rude back... You have got to respect each other. If they don't respect me then I'm not going to give them respect' (Tam)*

In turn, Leon expressed great frustration at the fact that teachers would often 'pick at things', pick at you, if you didn't do something, like if you were sat against the wall they would have a go at you for no reason which has got nothing to do with the lesson'. Moreover, in a similar way to Tam's sentiments, whilst Tristan felt that an overly strict approach to teaching made lessons 'boring', both Gemma and Cher suggested that pupils could be 'put off' of subjects by teachers they disliked and make 'more of an effort' for those they did.

### **Summary.**

Pulling these seams of data together, what emerges is a sense of the ways in which these working class young people's schooling careers were constantly stirring and settling along multiple axes, straining to be re/made. Within this, we have seen how layers of meaning and ways of being appeared to be wrapped around the institutional structures and processes of schooling. Indeed, echoing earlier work, the scholastic extremes in particular appeared to be laden with different shades of stigma which could also be inflected with class – bottom/'Chav'/lack of positive schoolwork ethic, top/'posh'/excessive schoolwork ethic – and offered a broad social-structural terrain through, within and against which careers were worked out. At one level, we have seen how the unravelling of young people's schooling could involve a negotiation of the costs and losses grafted on to these stigmas – precarious 'choices' between popularity and reaching for degrees of academic success. Yet in honing down to the level of these twists and turns, at the same time we have also revealed how many young people continue to be caught within a complex medley of additional intersections within which the gathering significance of GCSE's also became entangled.

Amongst this, we saw how boredom, teacher-pupil conflict, and truancy marked Shelly's career before she was eventually offered an under-16 college placement; how low scholastic

position, ‘proximity to poverty’, bullying and permanent exclusion formed the crux of Dan’s career; and how problems with schoolwork/learning, boredom, and extensive truancy had defined Casey’s schooling. Whilst different combinations and degrees of these intersections were present in many other careers, we also saw how the illness or death of family members and house moves could provide additional nodes through which they were wrought. Moreover, for those who were not ‘levered out’ of school early, final exams appeared to cut past the meanings of the social-structural terrain and galvanise efforts to ‘swot’ amongst those who had not already done so, with the varying degrees of subsequent success also appearing to overlap with the tone and texture of past intersectionalities. In turn, whilst teachers most regularly emerged in young people’s accounts in relation to the varied points of conflict they experienced with them, iniquitous and inconsistent treatment by teachers continued as a consistent theme, seen to steer levels of help and attention with work and/or as being provocative in terms of pupils’ behaviour.



# 9

## **Learning Your Way Out? A Sociology of Working Class Educational Experience.**

### ***Introduction.***

In Chapter 1 we began by orientating this study in relation to two broad and overlapping contradictions and concerns which framed and contextualised the relationship between social class and education during New Labour's time in office. The first relates to the contemporary 'paradox of class' in which the links between its continuing structural significance and explicit forms of consciousness, culture and action appear to have weakened, with class becoming more subterranean and enmeshed with thinking about its associated inequalities in terms of personal and cultural deficiency. Intersecting with this, the second relates to New Labour's efforts to generate a more inclusive society via an education system organized around socially exclusive principles of 'the market'. Working within these key contradictions and concerns, this study has sought to think about social class, compulsory education and social exclusion together, and it is in this final chapter that we pull together our reviews of policy, pre-existing research, and the study's theoretical framework in order to think through the key findings of its empirical components. In this respect, we turn to the core questions which have steered the study, probing and unpicking our primary query through close attention to those relating to each of the study's two empirical tiers. Divided into two corresponding sections then, the first explores the way in which the paradox of class, pre-service training, ongoing teaching practice, and the education policy regime fit together within the accounts of education professionals. It identifies three key narratives within their accounts – 'ability', 'social constructivism' and 'deficiency' – and explores their complex and shifting relationship to social class, and in turn, what this can tell us about both social exclusion and the contemporary thrust of education policy. In turn, findings from young people form the basis of section two in which we take on a more thematic discussion which attends to core currents within their accounts whilst also attempting to keep hold of the dynamic and processural quality of their narratives. In the final chapter that follows, we draw out the main conclusions of the study, and use these to signal not only potential avenues for further work, but to discuss unfolding developments in education policy and some of the challenges of moving in alternative directions.

## **Section 1: ‘Thinking about’ & ‘Processing’ Working Class Pupils.**

‘In education and social policy generally the new orthodoxy, the market solution, is a new master narrative, a deeply fissured but primary discourse’ (Ball, 2006: 74).

These words from Ball’s Foucauldian interrogations of ‘policy’ and its multilayered functions begin to capture, contain and contextualise the dynamics and various logics within education professionals’ accounts. Indeed, rather than a strictly singular narrative, it is more accurate to read their accounts as being made up of a number of tensions, contractions and dilemmas (‘fissures’) which are simultaneously opened up and silenced by the ‘master narrative’ of the education policy regime. In this respect, education professionals drew upon three distinct discourses in accounting for the difficulties and ‘failures’ associated with working class schools and pupils, and these surfaced, dived and shifted from one to another as the interlocking external and internal influences of the educational marketplace were explored. This trio of repertoires functioned as templates or vocabularies for thinking, speaking, and ultimately, acting, which were rooted in narratives of ‘ability’, ‘social constructivism’, ‘deficiency’, and which themselves bore multiple and shifting relationships to social class.

### ***On the Language(s) of Class.***

One of the key findings of this study is that class continues to circulate through contemporary schooling in multiple and complex ways. Indeed, class as an economic category seldom featured in the accounts of education professionals. Whilst there were a scattering of references to the economic viability of middle class families living near desirable schools or even considering private education, class circulated primarily through the cultural and symbolic realms of the social world. Within this, class featured in ways which were protean, diffuse, and characterised by varying degrees of in/explicitness, gathering together different discursive currents, euphemisms and vernaculars to articulate difference, distance, distinction and cleave out ‘Otherness’. In terms of our theoretical framework this *is* class – this is how class operates at a perceptual and experiential level: a relational and comparative frame of reference in which people from ‘objective’ class categories are made meaningful and the social world takes its different hues (Savage, 2000). In this respect, whilst class was sometimes explicitly named as ‘class’, it is through close attention to surrogates, shorthand’s, lines of differentiation, internal cross-referencing and triangulation between these that education professionals accounts were interpreted and mapped out. Referential chains such as the

‘professional’, ‘educated’ and ‘caring’ parent; the ‘rough school’; the ‘clever’ pupil; the ‘poorly behaved’ pupil; *that* ‘area of town’, all have their correlations and Others, and are inextricably entangled in long and cross-cutting discursive currents (Youdell, 2006). It is not the intention here to position the shadowy presence of class amongst teachers as a novel finding (Keddie, 1973; Ball, 1981; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008), or by the same note, to romanticise a past era of radical pedagogic class consciousness (Ball, 1990). Beyond theoretical standards of what class should and ought to be like, this study has worked from the (oxymoronic) position that these deep perceptual modes of differentiating – ‘structures of feeling’, thinking and acting (Thompson, 1963: 116) – are what class has always been about. However, where this study nudges things on is in having worked with this at a particular time and in a particular set of circumstances. Indeed, this deep life of class perpetually unravels within particular contexts and conditions (Bourdieu, 1984), and in the milieu of contemporary compulsory schooling, the dominant structuring force – the ‘master narrative’ - is the market form. In this respect, we now move on to consider the shifting ways in which class was called up, silenced and transmuted amongst the pressures and imperatives of the educational marketplace.

### ***Initial Teacher Training.***

From the offset, the complex presence of class was born out in findings relating to ITT. Indeed, for those who were in the throws of their PGCE’s or had already completed them, there was an opening disjuncture between their feeling that class was a ‘big thing’ that ‘affects... a huge amount’, and its absence from official course content. In this respect, their acknowledgement of the continuing significance of class reworks its contemporary ‘paradox’ in terms of a mismatch between individual and state - between a subjective recognition of its salience, and a corresponding absence from ‘officialdom’. This immediately positions class as inappropriate and irrelevant to the business of teaching, echoing Prime Minister Major’s insistence that ‘teachers should learn how to teach children to read, not waste time on the politics of gender, race and class’ (cited in Tomlinson, 2005: 56), whilst also beginning to resonate with concerns that the preparation of the future teacher workforce has been increasingly desocialised (Barton *et al*, 1994; Mahony & Hextall, 1997; Ball, 1999; Crozier, 1999; Gewirtz, 2000; Hartley, 2000; Winter, 2000; Hill, 2001, 2007; Furlong, 2001, 2005; Gilroy, 2002; Reay, 2004; Younger, 2007; Maguire, 2011). Indeed, in a related way, descriptions of ITT in its contemporary form echoed concerns that courses offer training of a largely technical and procedural nature that leave little room for critical explorations of the content, form and purposes of education. Yet at the same time, we have also seen how

‘learning how to teach’ involved a key emphasis on making education accessible and ‘providing for all’ which was specifically tied to the intersecting ideas of ‘inclusion’ and ‘differentiation’. With the former presented as the need to cater for pupils of all abilities, the latter referred to the subsequent process of tailoring and targeting work to different segments of the ‘ability’ spectrum.

We can begin to see here how a narrative of ‘ability’ – ‘thinking about’ and ‘processing’ pupils in relation to it – is called up and encouraged from the earliest moments of teaching, and how within this, the complex relationships between such *educational* categories and *social* categories such as class appear to be silenced and rendered inconsequential to teaching. Whilst the historical durability of class-based educational inequalities reminds us that there is no silver bullet with which to tackle them, for Youdell (2006: 182), knowledge and awareness of the in’s and out’s and dynamics of multiple identity categories (such as class, ‘race’, gender, sexuality, dis/ability) are key to teachers being able to ‘interrogate how their own practices in the classroom and the corridor, the meeting room and the staffroom, are implicated in the ongoing constitution of subjects inside schools’. Although this is not to imply that those involved in the provision of ITT do not engage in efforts to augment knowledge of such issues amongst the more domineering official requirements of ITT of which two-thirds is school-based, the findings from this study suggest that if not drowned out, then the peripheral and non-systematised nature of such efforts appears to leave trainees unable to be explicit about how their ‘learning to teach’ was connected to such issues.

However, education professionals’ distinctions between this university-based ‘theoretical’ component of ITT and its school-based ‘practical’ components begin to add greater depth and complexity to this picture. As we recall, ‘practice’ was organised to give trainees experience across a range of educational contexts, meaning that alongside educational professionals who were already practicing, those still in the throws of their ITT were able to share thoughts and experiences of teaching in what were interchangeably described as ‘(white) working class’, ‘rough’, ‘tough’ and/or ‘inner-city’ schools. From this, the crucial point to make is that in contrast to the nature of the ‘theory’ based component of training, ‘practice’ offered experiential immersion within educational contexts, processes, relationships and subsequently, access to all together different layers of knowledge which left little difference between education professionals accounts in terms of the development and levelling of criticism at the broad logics of the education system. Although this does not detract from concerns that ‘political complexity is [officially] bleached out’ of ITT (Maguire, 2011: 32), in a Foucauldian

sense it reminds us of the incomplete and non-total nature of policy, and that at some level, power is always crafting its own antithesis.

### *Narratives from Without.*

Pressures to perform were at the core of accounts from education professionals. Performativity was the currency of their trade within the educational marketplace, and in many respects, their articulations of the dynamics which framed and contextualised their schools, their practices, and the educational experiences of working class pupils resonated strongly with existing research (Gewirtz, 1997; Reay, 1998c, Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Indeed, what came to the fore in this seam of accounts was the degree to which league table performance had become schools' *raison d'état* – a lynchpin which appeared to bend and orientate the sinews and fibres of schooling in a particular direction. In taking the long-view of English state education, we have already located marketisation within an ebb and flow of class-imbued struggles over the relationship between education, economy, society, and traced the connected fetishisation of measureable and comparable 'standards' since teachers were seen to have depressed them during the comprehensive era. Whilst marketisation was intended to raise standards as schools vied for pupils and funding on the relative merits of their league table performance, it was the threat or reality of failing in the marketplace, and the subsequent long-term survival/position of their schools which infused the accounts of education professionals. As Ball (2008: 45) points out, 'competition as a device is only effective where market 'failure' impacts on the survival or well-being of individual organisations', and this was powerfully reflected in the way in which education professionals traced the links between pupil rolls, funding, numbers of staff, and the spectre of the 'snowballing effect' in which schools could enter spirals of decline. This was a zero-sum struggle for custom, described by Sally as a system in which schools were 'victims' of each others successes. Within this, it was also suggested that struggling schools found it difficult to retain staff, providing the bulk of initial employment opportunities through which new teachers could cut their teeth before themselves moving on.

However, whilst such findings are a reminder of the educational and emotional costs for those who find themselves at the wrong end of a market that hinges on the existence of 'winners' and 'losers', in accounting for this, class surfaced within education professionals' accounts in ways which became entangled with a narrative of 'deficiency'. Indeed, whilst government often had a faint and flickering presence within accounts, parents were seen as the key driver that continually brought the zero-sum logic of the system and the primacy of its performative pressures into being. Yet against the 'idealised' ('neutral') workings of the market in which

rational self-interest determines choice, education professionals read the parentocratic mode of educational provision as deeply social, irrational, and crucially determined by social class. In this respect, findings bore close resemblance to the picture that emerged from our reviews of research in this area (see Chapter 3). Indeed, it was an active and engaged middle class that animated the zero-sum system of survival by results. Beyond the scattering of references to economic capital already noted, education professionals saw them as being much more likely and able to use the ‘cold’ knowledge of league tables to seek out and secure places within ‘better’, ‘high-achieving’, ‘nice’, ‘leafy-lane’ state schools, with class-inflected ‘hot’ knowledge playing into their interconnected avoidance of ‘rough’ schools (Ball & Vincent, 1998). In contrast, cold knowledge was seen to lie beyond the boundaries of what working class parents considered during their choice-making, and this was paralleled by a number of references to both their difficulty in deciphering it and an intersecting prioritisation of staying within the bounds of their immediate localities. Taken together, we saw how this began to resonate with existing characterisations of working and middle class parents as ‘local/disconnected’ and ‘privileged/skilled choosers’ for whom different constellations of economic, social and cultural capital set their choice-making within respective ‘local’ and ‘cosmopolitan circuits of schooling’ (Gewirtz et al 1995; Ball et al, 1995; Reay & Ball, 1997).

Whilst class was sometimes named within this layer of accounts, it mostly continued to circulate through chains of relational surrogates, anchored for instance within references to different areas of residence and levels of parental education that were in turn worked through a further set of key and morally loaded distinctions - levels of parental ‘care’, ‘interest’, ‘support’ and ‘aspiration’. It is through this final, more evaluative dimension that this study’s findings begin to veer off from those of research rooted in the accounts of parents themselves. Indeed, with the exception of four education professionals, references to constellations of capital were at one and the same time undercut by a more routine and regular sense that the attitudinal qualities of parents were the ultimate forerunner of active engagement. As we saw, whilst the greater thickness of data in relation to middle class parents reflected the view that they were much more active and engaged in their choice-making, at one level, the *inactivity* and *disengagedness* of working class parents emerged through their silent presence as ‘Others’ to their middle class counterparts who *simply were* more ‘active’, ‘engaged’, ‘interested’ and ‘supportive’, with their Others *simply lacking* these positive qualities. Yet at the same time, explicit comparisons of the differential levels of ‘care’, ‘expectation’, ‘importance’, ‘value’ and ‘interest’ they attached to their children’s education also broke the surface of accounts, and were later powerfully rejoined and more comprehensively born out in education

professionals' accounts from within school that pointed to the deficiencies of working class parents as placing the ultimate brake on what schools and teachers could hope to achieve for their children.

Here we can glimpse the 'master narrative' of the market calling class up and into being in ways that circulate through particular discursive currents. Note how the market form demands and depends upon self-interestedness – both at institutional and familial level – and must necessarily elide equality of educational provision, with the concomitant effect being that those who appear to be inert in the struggle to secure positional advantages for their children can be inscribed with a much more irrational and deplorable kind of selfishness. Indeed, the marketisation of education has institutionalised a blurring of the boundaries between home and school, with parenting having been reconstructed as an 'educational enterprise' in which loving and safeguarding one's child includes taking responsibility for their academic development (Ericsson & Larsen, 2002: 93). In this respect, the market form creates 'a new *moral* environment' (Ball, 1998: 259, emphasis added). It formally expands the boundaries of action, and through this, education professionals do not neutrally mark differences in parental choice-making, but also begin to assess and account for them in ways that read, recognise, recycle and reproduce class through its long historical associations with pathology. Through a narrative of deficiency then, education professionals invoke what Sayer (2005: 4) describes as 'folk sociology' – a discursive template through which people attempt to 'explain the behaviour and characteristics of others, particularly the behaviour of members of other classes which they find problematic'. In this instance, it is the widely entrenched vernacular stock of the 'underclass' which informs and structures their lore, splitting class from the political economy in ways which foregrounds it as an attitudinal, moral and cultural category through which to judge, assess, abnormalise and hold working class parenting up as 'the antithesis of good parenting' (Gillies, 2007: 2).

In terms of our broader theoretical framework, there is complex shifting around here which we can begin to unravel in relation to social exclusion and the question of 'whom' or 'what' excludes. At one level, education professionals' accounts of the zero-sum dynamics of contemporary educational provision can be read as a strong/hierarchical version of exclusion in which the net actions of a more powerful middle class generates and defines the educational settings and experiences of a less powerful working class (Brown, 1990). In turn, the desire shared by the majority of education professionals to see the removal of the league-table-

lynchpin of the zero-sum system can be read through the lens of RED<sup>25</sup> – as a desire to interrupt, check and redistribute power and resources. However, through a narrative of deficiency, this co-exists with a weak/horizontal version of exclusion in which the role of middle class agency pales, and working class people begin to surface as the primary cause of their own educational disadvantages. We can in turn begin to read this in terms of SID and MUD given that what defines working class parents in relation to choice-making is their failure to use and engage with choice in the same way as their middle class counterparts because of key cultural-attitudinal differences. Yet through and within this, we can also begin to draw out a further dimension which starts to key into education professionals’ narratives of ‘ability’, and which in turn complicates notions of ‘performativity’ and ‘standards’ at the heart of both the market form and New Labour’s approach to social inclusion.

Indeed, in contrast to the political desocialisation of ‘standards’ and ‘performance’, the imperative to perform sustained by the zero-sum competition of the marketplace – and the subsequent condition of failing, struggling and/or improving – hung upon the net class-imbued in/actions of parents which education professionals saw as underpinning the negative ‘skewing’ of pupil intakes. Driving the unravelling of further distance from the comprehensive ideal then, the decisive impact of middle class engagement with choice did not linger simply in their attraction to good league table performance, but in their carrying the raw ingredients of such performance – ‘ability’ – with them. This was made particularly stark through accounts of the ‘snowballing effect’ in which class was simultaneously named and then condensed to a recodified shorthand of ‘ability’. In this respect, having an intake which was ‘mostly working class’ with not ‘so many... professional people’ slid into the imagery of a ‘long tail towards the low ability and less in your high ability’, and similarly, the potential exodus of a ‘critical mass’ of ‘middle class’ children was at the crux of slipping into spirals of decline with the middle class Others that remained. Indeed, whilst Gewirtz (1997: 225) reminds us that low-attaining pupils have always been associated with ‘low-ability’ and ‘poor quality’, through this seam of education professionals accounts we can begin to glean the tip of what Gillborn & Youdell (2000: 212, 52) have described as a ‘new-IQism’ in which older, discredited hereditarian notions of intelligence and their accompanying inequities are reworked through a ‘discourse of ability’, pulled to the fore by the *raison d’état* of measurable performance, and through which ‘intake and final achievement in GCSE’s is seen as practically inevitable’.

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<sup>25</sup> RED (Redistributive Discourse), SID (social integrationist discourse), and MUD (moral underclass discourse) (Levitas, 1998) (see Chapter 3).



Yet through our theoretical framework we can read these findings in a particular way, teasing out how the ‘master narrative’ of the market form gathers aspects of the social world together and acts as a pervasive steering logic through which class has a shifting presence. At one level then, whilst the market form nurtures a class-imbued moral economy of parenting in which a narrative of ‘deficiency’ accounts for intakes that are negatively ‘skewed’ towards working class pupils, we can also begin to see how it nurtures an overlapping economy of pupil worth in which the significance of class takes a different hue, conflated and subsumed through a narrative of ‘ability’ in which working class pupils are of lesser value in terms of a schools’ performative *raison d’état*. At the same time, through the narrative of ability we can also trace another weak/horizontal version of exclusion in which the possibility of its being wrought through dynamic and relational processes is rubbed out, with exclusion positioned as the property of ‘the excluded’ themselves in a way that directly undermines New Labour’s ‘supply-side’ approach to the generation of a more inclusive society. Indeed, whilst the analytical tools of RED, MUD and SID are blunted by a narrative of ‘ability’, there remains a dense network of shifting cross-wires and contradiction here given that whilst New Labour’s desocialised ‘standards’ approach positioned schools as hyper-agentic, this was seated within a market system that lends itself to an economy of pupil worth that appears to corrode education professionals’ own sense of agency. However, in moving on to findings from education professionals’ accounts from within schools, we can begin to both bolster *and* draw out important ‘fissures’ within the logic of preceding interpretations.

### ***Narratives from Within.***

Whilst there was a strong sense that improving a schools performance/market position was associated with sourcing higher quality raw materials which rendered middle class parents/pupils as ideal/desirable customers, from the offset we can begin to fracture the narrative of ‘ability’ by unravelling the ways in which schools were nonetheless embroiled in ongoing strategies to manage and improve performance with/despite existing intakes. In a connected way, it is also crucial to note that a desire to ‘make a difference’ was a key motivational ingredient that steered education professionals, and we began to unpick this as a transformative orientation bound to an implied notion that things were not as they could/should be, and that through them, education was seen as able to change the status quo at the level of individual lives. Whilst reclaiming a sense of agency, this was also peppered with class-imbued vignettes of stirring encounters with illiteracy during stints of employment after university, and desires to ‘go back’ and inspire pupils to use the ladder of education for journeys of upward social mobility as they had done. This was the basis of a ‘critical’ frame of

reference - a narrative of ‘social constructivism’ which was well encapsulated by Anthony’s assertion that it was ‘theoretically’ possible for everybody to ‘get degrees if they want to, why the hell not?’ Indeed, in a similar way to Gillborn and Youdell’s (2000: 212, original emphasis) study, it is not the intention here to argue that education professionals ‘‘consciously accept’ the hereditarian position’, but rather, to suggest that their accounts indicate that they ‘*behave* as if they do’.

Indeed, this study presents the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ as the very template through which education professionals swung out of, questioned, and reflected upon the interconnections between their practice and what happened within schools, and in this respect, we can trace strong homologies with Keddie’s (1973) distinction between ‘educationalist’ and ‘teacher’ contexts. As we saw, the former embodied an ‘informed and expert view of education’ in which the teachers of her study discussed ideology, theory, school politics, denied inherited intelligence, and recognised the divisive and disadvantageous impact of streaming and labelling processes. In contrast to this sense of ‘how things *ought* to be in school’, the latter context was the ‘the world of *is*’ in which they could often ‘speak and act’ in contradictory ways by emphasising ‘moral’ and ‘social’ aspects of pupils over cognitive skills whilst simultaneously presenting them ‘as though they were cognitive skills’ (*ibid*: 135, 141, original emphasis). However, there are a number of subtle inversions to tease out from education professionals’ accounts which are in turn related to the particular ways in which the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ emerged and was weighted within them. Indeed, this was a weaker, flickering, and incomplete narrative through which education professionals expressed *unease* about what they described *as happening* within schools, and it thereby surfaced largely in the wake of a leading narrative of ‘ability’ prioritised by the zero-sum imperatives of the market form, and to which ‘making a difference’ appeared to be closely harnessed. In this respect, rather than an ‘informed and expert view of education’, the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ was a more timid, ‘unofficial’, and back-footed one.

Indeed, if jockeying for position within the logic of the education policy regime meant working with ‘ability’ as the raw ingredient of league table performance, then strategies to manage and improve performativity were lubricated by the generation of *predictive* ‘ability’ data which allowed for the development and monitoring of performance targets for individual and groups of pupils, and was instantly accessible and shared via tailor-made computer software. Composed largely of primary SAT’s results, scores from CAT tests, and FFT measures purchased from outside organisations, we saw how one of the first and most

fundamental uses of predictive data was to assign pupils to different ability sets shortly after CAT's had been administered at the start of year 7, or during year 8 when pupils had had a chance to settle into their secondary schooling. In turn, the stock rationale for all this was that it provided a way of closely matching teaching to ability, and thereby allowed pupils to 'achieve at the right level'. Alongside clear homologies with ITT, from the offset we can begin to discern how the narrative of 'ability' was deeply institutionalised within schools – a practically anchored 'first principle' through which predictive data formed a key building block for 'thinking about' and 'processing' pupils in an effort to maximise performance.

However, through the narrative of 'social constructivism' we can explore how education professionals appeared to be immersed within a series of contradictions and dilemmas through which they expressed the unease that further fractured and fissured the leading narrative of 'ability'. Indeed as we saw, the validity of predictive data was called into question by suggestions that its predictive power was stowed in its effects, and in this respect, 'thinking about' and 'processing' pupils according to a standardised numerical form was likened to a 'Fordist production line' which lost sight of the role that more developmental 'human factors' played in educational achievement. Within this, education professionals described how the power of predictive data could function as a brake on both teachers' and pupils' expectations of academic 'ability'/success in a way which could leave pupils 'written off'. Moreover, echoing the findings of other work, the vernacular of this seam of accounts was of an arid reductionism and dispiritment (Troman, 1996; Gewirtz, 1998; Reay, 1998c; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Education professionals described how 'pressures to perform' and 'teach for exams', 'tests' and 'grades' was 'de-motivating'; how teaching was subsequently 'condensed' in a way that mitigated against the exploration of 'tangents'; how this was seen to have negatively altered 'pupils' perceptions of education', and as Sally suggested, had steered teachers into 'nagging' relationships with pupils, as 'robots' rather than 'human beings'.

Here we can begin to see how the long arm of the market form reaches deep into classrooms and their composite relations, bending the fabric of schooling to its dynamism in ways which again foreground educational marketisation as a 'new moral environment'. Whilst the spectre of the 11+ hangs within the quiet creeping back of an immediate emphasis upon 'thinking' and 'processing' in relation to final outcomes, as we saw, this practice was described as a 'savage' one, best done discreetly lest it be judged unfavourably from without by parents. Indeed, through this layer of accounts, the kind and degree of performativity which the zero-sum logic of the market holds in place appears to demand that education professionals go against

themselves and engage in practices which they see as being counterproductive, unsound, and somewhat antithetical to ‘making a difference’. In this respect, we can see how professional judgement is pressed up against the incentives, rewards, pressures and punishments of the marketplace (Ball, 1990), and in terms of our broader theoretical framework, suggestions that the links between the market form and ‘standards’ might hinder educational achievement once again problematises New Labour’s approach to the generation of a more inclusive society. In contrast to the narrative of ‘ability’ then, the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ invokes a strong/hierarchical version of exclusion which begins to position its making within the rhythms of schooling itself, and this was the point at which desires to knock-out the performative league table-lynchpin surfaced most strongly (RED).

However, the susceptibility of this narrative to obfuscation, clouding and fracture by the leading narrative of ‘ability’ – with the narrative of ‘deficiency’ also on hand at key moments – was most clearly born out in relation to the practice of setting by ability through which class surfaced in a familiar yet illustrative way. As we saw, whilst prompted descriptions of the tendency for sets to reflect social class divisions resonated with a long line of research (Simons, 1953; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981; Boaler, 1997; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), we explored examples of residential area, parental occupations/unemployment, and elements of connected attitudinal traits being brought together to identify this ‘clear trend’/‘strong correlation’ between class and the scholastic order. Yet following on from the clarity of this puncture point, class took up an awkward and largely silent presence as a blank, matter-of-fact correlation to the scholastic order and its effects which were otherwise neatly and comfortably subsumed within the synergistic language of setting and ‘ability’ – chains of hierarchical binaries such as ‘high/low ability’, ‘top/low end’, ‘non/academic’, ‘intelligent/not very bright’. In this respect, class was again folded into shorthand’s that simultaneously conflated it with ‘ability’ whilst subtly severing ‘ability’ from working class pupils. In addition, we also explored a poignant example in which the recognition of overlaps between these *social* and *educational* categories was considered a judgemental bias, with the final dismissal of its relevance leaving the (‘meritocratic’) narrative of ‘ability’ intact and the more radical reading irrelevant to the business of teaching. Borrowing from Ball’s (1981: 37) ethnographic explorations of pupil banding, we can here glimpse the way in which setting provides an additional structure through which education professionals are encouraged to ‘take’ rather than ‘make’ pupil identities – swirling with predictive data to offer ready-made divisions through which cohorts are filtered and easily reduced to the ‘singular and unitary characteristics’ that place them there (*ibid*: 264).

However, against the stock rationale for setting, we can begin to tease out a further contradiction through which education professionals expressed the unease that fractured and fissured the leading narrative of ‘ability’. Indeed, through a narrative of ‘social constructivism’ education professionals once again echoed long lines of research in qualifying the benefits and effectiveness of sets as being concentrated at the top of the hierarchy, describing the way in which ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ were ‘worlds apart’ within which learning outcomes were ‘exaggerated’, and how these environments steered different teacher-pupil relationships with regards academic and behavioural expectations, offering in turn an additional glimpse of sets as a framework for ‘taking’ rather than ‘making’ pupil identities (Simons, 1953; Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981; Boaler, 1997; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Moreover, in conjunction with testing and the omnipresence of the all-important 5 A\*-C GCSE grades measured by league tables, whilst those at the top of the scholastic order were associated with combinations of pressure, insecurity, confidence, arrogance and professional aspirations, for those further down the hierarchy, setting emerged as a practice implicated in the generation of fragile learning identities/orientations to school/schoolwork marked by poor behaviour and a lack of confidence which education professionals found difficult to counter and challenge (re/‘make’). Resonating closely with studies of the kinds and degrees of pupil subcultural ‘polarisation’ that can follow the grooves of institutional ‘differentiations’ between them (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981), education professionals suggested that such identities/orientations were shaped by relational processes, with those ‘lower down the pecking order’ ‘coping’ with and ‘masking’ the significance of their positions through deliberate confrontation, misbehaviour and/or ‘coolness’. Through the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ then, education professionals once again emerge as embroiled in contradictory efforts to raise ‘standards’ through practices which they saw as counterproductive for those lower down the scholastic order. Yet whilst within this seam of accounts there was a quiet and unnamed spiralling down towards ‘hidden injuries of class’ – the weight of judgements lived as a structure of feeling (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) – beyond this, things began to roll back and slip away, revealing the unsteady and incoherent nature of this narrative.

Indeed, in the first instance it is significant to note that unlike league tables and their connected regimes of performance targets and testing, despite the negative impact of setting for those lower down the hierarchy it was absent from the inventory of things education professionals wished to see changed or abolished. Whilst we have seen how setting fits into the demands of performativity, in conjunction with Linda’s suggestion that it took ‘a very skilled teacher’ to be

able to teach mixed-ability classes we might also tentatively infer that setting – unlike the ‘pressure to perform’ held in place by what they sought to tame or jettison – worked in their interests as a convenient and less demanding way of organising their practice. Yet at the same time, the partial nature of the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ also stemmed from the complex ways in which pupil behaviour was positioned within their accounts. For instance, beyond references to the level and pace of higher set curricula that once again invoke the narrative of ‘ability’, the threat that lower set pupils might have hindered their momentum through misbehaviour extended the stock rationale for setting from performance maximisation to include behavioural boundary maintenance. However, whilst the *generative influence* of setting upon behaviour was not traced through to accounts of its combining with ‘ability’ to *determine assignment* to sets, we also saw how despite relating/reducing misbehaviour to boredom which issued from technical weaknesses in the mechanics of teaching, only two education professionals considered the position and role of curricula issues within all this. In turn, whilst the whole notion of ‘intervening’ to boost D/C borderline pupils over the all important A\*-C GCSE threshold (‘triage’ (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000: 108)) undermined the rationale and superstructure of predictive ‘ability’ data, the stark inequity of including some and not others in opportunities to improve brought great unease. Yet whilst we might read this as a ‘commodification’ which feeds back into notions of an economy of pupil worth (Ball, 1998), education professionals’ being pressed up against the ‘new moral environment’ of the market form in having to make such in/exclusionary decisions was also manifest in Sally’s assertion that within such conditions, salvaging at least some pupils had in and of itself become a clear professional-moral duty. However, the shadow of class as ‘ability’ pushed back at this whilst simultaneously deepening these ‘deformed ethics’ (*ibid*, 82). Indeed, for those ‘beyond the threshold (Room, 1995: i), we not only saw how switching ‘over to diplomas and much more vocational courses’ were seen as a convenient way to meet ‘your targets’, but how those ‘non-academic’ pupils at which they were aimed would be better suited to vocational forms of education. Whilst the stock rationale for predictive ‘ability’ data and setting by ability’ win back space through this slide into vocationalism, it also powerfully rejoins with the otherwise near total lack of consideration of issues relating to curricula beyond this strategy to ‘improve’.

Yet intersecting with this, for the same majority of education professionals, time and again the narrative of ‘social constructivism’ was all too easily trampled on, contradicted and trumped by slides into ‘folk sociologies’ in which the narrative of ‘deficiency’ shifted

responsibility for the making of working class educational experience on to working class parents. Indeed, in marrying-up with accounts of educational choice-making, through seams of data from within school we saw how working class parents and their children could be read off as being fundamentally at odds with the rhythms, requirements and purposes of education. Set against the active and engaged concern of middle class parents for their children's schooling, whilst there were several suggestions that the fact of their 'Others' being beyond teachers' 'control' had 'created a blame culture of external factors outside the school', it was again the discursive repertoire of 'the underclass' which carved out the latter's position within the moral economy of parenting. Indeed, echoing Dunne & Gazeley's (2008) findings, in many respects this was where ultimate shares of agency-responsibility for the making of educational experience were assigned and apportioned, setting out the interrelated laws and limits of social reproduction and 'making a difference' - 'what it boils down to at the end of the day'. For instance, whilst the broad message here was that children 'basically turn out like their parents', intergenerationally transmitted cultural pathologies were at the heart of explanations which were elastic, ready-to-hand, and deployable in ways which gathered together and accounted for the nature of working class pupils as a raw educational input. Indeed, despite the essential logic of their readings being compromised by suggestions that parental involvement was greater in primary schools and dwindled thereafter as 'you go down the sets and up the years', there were also a scattering of references to the intimidating nature of schools for some parents, or to the impact of their limited educational skills. Yet beyond this, constellations of capitals were conspicuously absent, and it was chains of morally loaded attitudinal traits which dominated. Alongside correspondence and correlations with those social class coordinates already traced, here 'poverty', 'social deprivation', parents with 'at least 'A' Levels' and those who had 'been to uni' surfaced as anchor points within accounts in which low levels of parental involvement, poor schoolwork ethic, misbehaviour and low aspirations were attributed to a lax, uncaring, selfish, disinterested and disengaged mode of parenting that failed to transmit proper standards and expectations.

In terms of our broader theoretical framework, whilst this slides powerfully back into a weak/horizontal version of exclusion in which MUD once again saps the agency that New Labour had pinned to schools, we can begin to go further here and draw out some related empirical and theoretical inferences and arguments relating to the significance of preceding discussions. Indeed, drawing on Lister's (2004: 90) work, we can read this as part of the way

in which the relational and processural nature of social exclusion is worked through its 'symbolic dimension'. Heavily recodified through a narrative of 'deficiency', class is mobilised as a framework for Othering – a process of 'cultural exclusion' whereby people are devalued and abnormalised against the norms, values and expectations of more powerful groups, with an intersecting set of implications for how they are treated both institutionally and interpersonally (*ibid*: 93). Through and within this, we can make a number discrete, tentative, yet illustrative points. For instance, despite the smaller likelihood that the parents onto which this narrative was projected would attend parents evening, we explored an example in which 'stereotypes' were not only made real when they did, but how this was 'good because you can see if you're going to get the support from home'. Whilst implying that this at some level feeds into 'thinking about' and 'processing' pupils, we might also point to the ways in which accounts of the nature of pupils 'in a place like that' or 'a place like this' appeared to demand a recalibration of desires to 'make a difference' through an engagement with compensatory efforts to ensure a basic social and moral reproduction of working class children which displaced the academic purposes of schooling – 'you can only ever hope to stop kids harming each other... and just leave them to it'; 'decent human beings... a normal human being'.

## **Section 2: Narratives of Working Class Educational Experience.**

Here we begin to feel our way into key findings from the study's sample of working class young people. In reaching for biographically-orientated accounts of their schooling careers, what we have generated are insights from those who experience and live through a compulsory system which is (at least at a rhetorical level) not only supposed to be for them, but who also formed part of the broad basis of the long-range futurity of New Labour's inclusive society. They are the grand/daughters and sons of cleaners, refuse collectors, dinner ladies, hauliers, glazers, supermarket checkout workers, publicans, shop fitters, builders, and secretaries for local building firms. Whilst some (had) lived on council estates, the remainder lived in working class neighbourhoods. Some never completed their compulsory schooling while others had left with few qualifications, and even those who appeared to be closer to traditional notions of academic success had been accessed via a list of pupils selected for 'triage' – through an uncertainty of their finally achieving the key 5 A\*-C GCSE yardstick of educational 'standards' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Yet beyond any rhetoric, they are the young people who have experienced and lived what we have explored and examined from the perspective of education professionals, and what our findings offer here is a sense of the



diverse constancy of class embedded within their schooling careers, surfacing as a ‘print’ that was ‘faintly written’ into the twists and turns of the processural and relational experiences that unfolded along crosscutting axes (Savage, 2003: 536-537). From amongst the heterogeneity of the experiential hues they gather together then, in terms of our theoretical framework this seam of findings bring class to bear as ubiquitous and ‘dynamic; a system of inequality which is constantly re-made in the large- and small-scale processes of social life’ (Lawler, 2005: 797), and wrought through different layers and dimensions of in/exclusion.

### **- On Rereading Representations of Narrative Data.**

Here we might usefully situate preceding discussions and those that follow in terms of Goldthorpe’s (1996; Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2007b) distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ effects. Indeed, following Boudon, whereas the former refers to whatever gets measured and represented as ‘ability’/attainment and the educational structures and opportunities that wrap themselves around it to set out the potential for class-based educational outcomes, the latter refers to subsequent negotiations of this potential by children and their parents. In this respect, we might read what education professionals reach for within the narratives of ‘ability’ and ‘deficiency’ as a primacy of primary effects – accounts of ‘thinking about’ and ‘processing’ pupils in relation to ‘ability’ which tends to sever it from working class pupils and/or position their families as a fundamental brake upon it and a schools performativity. Moreover, in earlier chapters we have explored the shifting “balance sheet of the class struggle’ over educational goods’ in which the contemporary education policy regime has taken shape (Gewirtz *et al* 1995: 55), and our discussions so far have not only teased out the ways in which this powerful and particular emphasis upon primary effects is galvanised and held in place by the market form, but how education professionals’ accounts paint a picture in which educational conditions and contexts are infused with and structured by class – from the zero-sum logic that steers intakes and priorities, to the strategies and procedures/structures and processes which answer and respond to this. However, set within this terrain, in exploring key findings from young people, in many ways we work at the intersections of primary and secondary effects. Moreover, in examining how their educational experiences and careers were shaped along multiple axes within time and space - rolling intersections of institutional structures and process, and their wider lives both within and beyond school - we opt for an ‘applied sociology’: ‘a toolbox of different concepts and theories... rather than a pure one’ (Ball, 1993: 10). However, whilst the shifting complexities of our findings demand this, *re*-representing young people’s accounts for broader heuristic value within following discussions ultimately remains unsatisfactory, not least in terms of

hanging on to their chronicity and shifting additivity. In this respect, despite straining to be minimally reductive, like Ball *et al's* (2000: 142) explorations of post-school narrative data, it remains 'a kind of failure, a collapse back into conventionality... an exercise in compromise' in which accounts are re-fragmented and parts selected in ways which leaves us nowhere near a joining-up of all dots. In the final instance then, what we reach for here is a more thematic approach which battles to stay mindful of the temporal quality of accounts and the complex shades of similarity and difference within them.

### ***Reading & Mediating Intersections with Home.***

In our earlier analysis of New Labour's political philosophy we saw how its 'supply-side egalitarianism' was heavily anchored by an emphasis upon the interrelated values of community and responsibility as mechanisms of self-help – seizure of opportunities generated by government that would benefit individual and national economy as 'two sides of the same coin' (CSJ, 1994: 223; Fairclough, 2000; Byrne, 2005; Alexiadou, 2005). In turn, we unpicked the ways in which a 'can do' work ethic underpinned by a reinvigorated family ethic were at the root of this, with families seen as teaching interpersonal commitment, responsibility, discipline, respect and assisting and supporting in the navigation of crises and opportunities for the fulfilment of individual potential (Davies, 2005; Levitas, 2005). Tracing out parallels with theories of a reflexive 'high' or 'late' modernity (Beck, 1992, 1997; Giddens, 1991), we positioned these political and academic threads as obscuring and/or jettisoning the contemporary salience of class, laying the grounds for a medley of social ills to be pinned to individuals and families through slides into MUD in which 'success' could be seen to depend upon 'being the right kind of self', and 'failure' tied to 'poor self-management' (Gillies, 2005a: 387). Whilst we can trace further homologies here with the notion of a moral economy of parenting and education professionals' narrative of 'deficiency', findings from young people offer a contrary picture of working class parents/carers and the interrelationship between home and school which resonates with research rooted in the accounts of parents themselves (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995; Reay, 1998b; Lucey *et al*, 2003; Gillies, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). However, besides offering further glimpses into the ways in which class circulates here, our findings give this resonance a different hue and significance by providing insights not only into the ways in which young people themselves read, understood, were positioned *vis a vis*, and managed these intersections, but how this could relate to facets of their schooling careers.

Indeed, the core finding from which we work here is that young people clearly understood their parents/carers as valorising education, whilst also bringing together a sense of the

complex class-imbued ‘fantasies, fears, hopes,... desires’, conflicts and frustrations which lined their relationships with their children’s schooling (Reay, 2005: 914). In the first instance, we explored how young people understood their parents as wanting them to do better than they had done at school, and indeed, to use the ladder of education to be more than them by impressing themselves upon their children as negative reference points that gathered together themes of aspiration, mobility, and the past educational fates of working class people. Whilst we began to unpick this as a neutral and meritocratic presentation of education which pathologised themselves, we also positioned their valorisation as a working class parental ‘frame of reference’ (FOR) in which educational endeavour and qualifications were seen as necessary for children’s future social and occupational selves - for ‘getting on’ within, or ‘getting out’ of the working class (Brown, 1987).

In turn, whilst we later go on to explore some young people’s avoidance of homework, as we saw, the majority explained that their parents/carers were/would have been willing and able to have helped them with homework up until their secondary years. Whilst tallying with the work of Gillies (2005a, 2005b, 2007) and Lucey *et al* (2003: 290) in which working class parents ‘only felt able to help their children in the early primary school years’, it also sits in contrast to research that points to the ways in which middle class parents are able to draw upon a superior stock of educational skills as part of the matrix of strategies by which they invest in and steer their children’s education (Reay, 1998; Ball, 2002). Moreover, echoing findings from Pomeroy’s (2000: 120) study of permanently excluded working class pupils, many of the young people of this study who had earlier avoided homework came to engage with it as they felt the final pressure of GCSE’s – ‘greater meaning imposed by the system: its coursework so its counts’. In this respect, the wider point to make is that in class terms, the historicity of educational inequality surfaces here in relation to the differing abilities of middle and working class parents/carers to act as educators at home, increasing as young people themselves might otherwise have needed and drawn upon such help most. However, for Tam, Dan and Cher, this was the case even in primary school, with the latter framing this as a paradox in which ‘never really [having] had family to help’ was set against the fact that schools and teachers work on the assumption that you ‘go home and ask your family’, thereby displacing the kind of teacher/teaching otherwise required – ‘that’s the time when you need a teacher isn’t it?’. Similarly, Gillies’ (2007: 97) work with working class mothers highlights not only the ways in which they want their children to do well at school, but that considerations of time, money, and their own educational skills mean that they rely ‘in the main on schools to educate their children’ and stress ‘the responsibility of teachers’.

However, from the perspective of young people, whilst this pragmatic division of labour may have been increasingly born out in relation to schooling as an academic endeavour, it was not so in relation to comportment at school, with parents/carers largely seen to support and reinforce the line of schools and teachers. Indeed, beyond the valorisation of schoolwork ethic through hopes that young people would do better than their parents/carers had done in school/life, we flagged up Dan and Dean's sentiments that their fathers had always been disappointed with their behaviour/performance, how for those that received contact from teachers regarding misbehaviour this brought 'trouble at home', and how parents evenings also brought relative combinations of sanctions and rewards. Moreover, we only encountered three accounts of parents/carers having 'had enough' and 'given up', and this was after years of attempting to reinforce such messages, offering encouragement, wishing their children would 'just.. get on with it', and trying to instil a sense of the regret that might later be felt (Casey, Shelly, Zac). Again we might note that like the working class mothers of Gillies (2007) study, given the relative strength of a pragmatic division between home and school, beyond any positive academic progress or parents evening reports parents/carers contact and involvement with schools appeared to be largely confined to their children being positioned as educational problems – as 'deviant', 'bad' or 'impossible learners' (Youdell, 2006). From the perspective of young people, given the ensuing responses, frustrations and conflicts at home we might tentatively speculate here that at some level their parents may have again reaffirmed schooling as meritocratic in ways which missed the less tangible systemic aspects of young people's being in school.

However, alongside this private and 'indirect' educational involvement, we also explored parent's valorisation of education through a scattering of instances when they had attempted to publicly and directly intervene in young people's schooling, testifying in turn to a critical rather than conservative stance. With all three relating to primary school, we saw how Carl's mum made an unsuccessful attempt to get him reassigned to top-set maths after he found the work too easy after reassignment to bottom; how Tam's difficulty with schoolwork and learning saw her mum make unsuccessful attempts to have her tested for Dyslexia (confirmed years later at a youth training centre); and how Cher's nan made repeated appeals for teachers to treat non-top set pupils fairly. Here we can usefully call upon Bourdieu & Passeron's (1979: 72) recognition of the difficulty working class parents can encounter in counterpoising 'the teachers authority' and judgement. Indeed, whilst we saw how education professionals tied the active engagement of middle class parents to a sense that they 'know' and 'work the system',

alongside the importance of economic capital and time the cultural clout activated and accrued by the habitus of middle class parents within schools has been explored as key to steering through educational problems where and when they arise (Reay, 1998b; 1998c; 2005c; Ball, 2003).

However, from here we steer more concertedly into a centring of young people themselves, picking up in turn on some of the complex intersectionalities of their accounts that straddled home and school. In the first instance, it is a subtle yet crucial point to note that home-school relations were essentially mediated by their being *within school*, and in a related way we can make a number of additional points in relation to parent's evening and homework. Indeed, at one level, whilst most parents/carers regularly attended parent's evenings, in contrast to the narrative of 'deficiency' and MUD, we saw how the disruption of Carl's dad's death, Casey's extensive truancy, Deans parents running pubs, Cher's nan's illness and her grandfather and Gemma's dad's jobs as long-distance hauliers accounted for their irregular/non-attendance. Yet in turn, we also saw how at secondary school both Leon and Macey would attempt to steer things by not telling their parents about parent's evenings or by being selective about which teachers they booked appointments with. Moreover, beyond/alongside any limits for parents to act as educators at home, some young people had their own complex reasons for avoiding homework. Beginning in primary school we saw how problems with schoolwork and learning meant that Mike, Tam and Casey avoided it altogether, how Shelly linked her avoidance of it to her general boredom with schoolwork, and how Dan, Zac, Carl and Dean explained their avoidance of homework as a way of maintaining a valued division between home and school. In a related way, we might here begin to trace overlaps and associations down through the capillaries of careers, pointing to the fact of young people's problems with schoolwork and learning mapping on to both lower positions in the hierarchy of sets and the narrative of 'ability'; to boredom as a failure of the National Curriculum to serve all pupils (Ball *et al*, 2000); and how non-completion of homework could generate/deepen conflict with teachers. In this final respect, whilst we have seen how behaviour combines with 'ability' to determine assignment to sets, we also saw how Carl felt that his being moved down a set for science and maths at secondary school *owed* to his avoidance of homework. Finally, whilst Gillies (2007) has described the way in which the working class mothers of her study worked hard to create homes which were safe, nurturing, alternative sources of value against the rigors and creeping failures of schooling, Dan, Zac, Carl and Dean's approach to homework suggests that they themselves may well have been engaged in something similar.

### ***Fitting-In & Getting In: Narratives of Non/Choice & Stalled Choice.***

Dense layers and intersections of class and social exclusion surfaced in relation to secondary school choice, bearing degrees of resonance with existing research rooted in the accounts of both parents and children, whilst also quietly resocialising and problematising the workings of the market form in relation to young people themselves. Indeed, as we saw, whilst young people had often attended school open days with their parents/carers as part of the decision making process, many explained that the final decision about which schools to attend had been their own. Moreover, where choices had existed and young people had had control over them, the chief importance of staying with primary school friends, avoiding bullies, or going to the same school as siblings meant that many choose to stay within a local ‘circuit of schooling’ (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995: 52). In this respect, many accounts tallied with research by Lucey & Reay (2000; Reay & Lucey, 2000: 86, 2003) whose displacement of parents as the central protagonists of choice-making has not only bolstered earlier work highlighting the much greater extent to which working class parents can defer to the wishes of their children than middle class parents (Ball *et al*, 1995; Gewirtz *et al*, 1995), but found that working class children place great importance upon friends, family, and ‘places and spaces in which to feel relatively safe... comfortable’, and ultimately, to ‘fit in’. Yet in terms of our broader theoretical framework we can begin to see here how inclusion *and* exclusion can co-exist across different layers and dimensions of the social world (Burchardt *et al*, 1999; Gordon *et al*, 2000; Pantazis *et al*, 2006), reading the primacy of ‘fitting in’ as a subjective concern to be socially included which is nonetheless set within an objective and exclusive zero-sum logic which elides equality of educational provision. In turn, from within this we can again pull up the market forms galvanising of a ‘new moral environment’. Indeed, beyond/alongside any intersecting impact of different constellations of capital, Ball *et al* (2000: 97) have pointed to the ways in which working class parents/carers often defer to their children because *they* are the ones that ‘have to live with the decisions’ (Ball *et al*, 2000). However, taken together with young people’s *criteria* for choosing, this again falls outside the instrumental rationality/reflexive modernisation which the market form demands and validates.

However, we can fracture and add heterogeneity to this in relation to the large minority of young people for who ‘choice’ was of a different hue. Indeed, whilst for Dean and Zac choice was rendered a non-choice by house moves which demanded they went where places were still available, for others the relationship between choice and peers was positioned as being of lesser consequence. Indeed, as we saw, a number had taken a more instrumental approach in their negotiations of the educational marketplace, with Carl opting for a school with a sports

specialism and Mike, John and Tristan taking the combination of tests and interviews for a nearby CTC – a new, successful, well equipped, ‘school for smart people’. For Carl and Mike this was related to future occupational selves as footballers and vets, and whilst we unpicked the overlaps between the primary effects of John and Tristan’s being in primary school – good SAT’s results, top sets, a sense of difference/superiority – and the secondary effects of their choosing, together they resonated with the ‘New Enterprisers’ of Mac an Ghail’s (1994: 63) study, exhibiting working class masculinities that embraced ‘new vocationalist study regimes’. Yet between them these choices courted the risk of either not getting in or not fitting in, and whilst Carl and Mike’s choices did come through, Mike’s family’s intersecting house move meant finally attending a school with available places, joining John and Tristan in demonstrating the non-linear, uncertain and contingent nature of both ‘choice’ and careers. Moreover, whilst for the latter two there was an indication that stalls in their choice-making (non-selection) may have been experienced as ‘hidden injuries of class’ (‘I was a bit gutted at the time’) (Sennett & Cobb, 1972), we can begin to touch upon points opened up more widely below by flagging how such experiences appeared to go ‘out-of-date’ in the wake of subsequent relative success (Ball *et al*, 2000: 62), whilst for others, they could become normalised and ‘unremarkable’.

However, we also saw how successful deviations from local circuits of schooling attended by primary friends could carry heavy costs in terms of fitting in, with class as a lived structure of relationality surfacing to blunt the original purposes of such choice in a way which allows us to tease out further crosscutting lines of exclusion and inclusion. For instance, moving up the scholastic order at primary school and befriending a girl that she decided to follow to a prestigious girl’s school, Gemma’s objective inclusion within a well resourced high performing school was undercut by her subjective exclusion within the informal world of school. Describing a ‘constant gut feeling’ through which she reached for differences in family vehicles, shopping/spending habits, and the language of ‘snobbery’/‘looking down’, she articulated the *inter*-class dynamics of the Othering which eventually saw her move to the kind of local, undersubscribed school her friend had initially encouraged her to avoid. Moreover, whilst we began to unpick this as a ‘dialectical confrontation’ between habitus and field that ‘generates suffering’ (Bourdieu cited in Ingram, 2011: 290), we read Dan’s failure to fit in at his secondary school as the result of *intra*-class differences. Indeed, as we saw, beyond those for whom choosing was blunted by moving house, Dan’s mum was the only parent to have taken control of choice-making, insisting that he attend a school with a good reputation beyond the school nearest their estate that had a name for being ‘hard’ and ‘rough’. This

resonates with Lucey & Reay's (2000: 90; Reay & Lucey 2000, 2003) descriptions of the ways in which some working class parents and pupils who live on council estates steer out of trends to choose (or allow their children to choose) within a local circuit of schools, looking further afield to 'good', 'successful' schools believed to be able to 'both keep them safe and produce them as safe for others'. Yet whilst we might read Dan's mum's choice as an attempt to ameliorate the realities of his class position, in a similar way to Gemma, his subsequent failure to 'fit in' only served to reinforce and consolidate it. In this respect, we saw how his 'proximity to poverty' excluded him from participating in the working class subcultural style of 'Chav' (Hayward & Yar, 2006; Nayak, 2006; McCulloch *et al*, 2006; Archer *et al*, 2007: 227), combining with his being 'from Hathely' (an estate) rather than 'Northwall' (a working class neighbourhood) to underpin the 'snobby' bullying that overlapped with his low scholastic position to place him at the margins of his school. Ultimately then, Dan's encounter with 'choice' calls up Ridge's (2002) reminder of the complex ways in which economic and social exclusion can fuse within schools to powerfully steer experience.

### ***Structures & Processes of the In/formal World/s.***

#### ***- SAT's, Sets & Mates.***

As a 'triumph of publishable, measurement-based, competitive, pencil and paper tests over diagnostic, open-ended, process-orientated assessments', Reay and Wiliam (1999: Reay, 2001: 342; Reay 2006) suggest that beyond the panoptical function SAT's serve in relation to teachers, the paradox of their being a practice aimed at raising educational standards and achievement is that they simultaneously 'fix failure' in working class pupils, with working class girls in particular experiencing them in terms of 'damage to the self' – confirmation of their 'innate' lack of 'educational ability' and 'being a nothing' (Reay, 2006: 300; Reay & William, 1999: 343). However, the findings of this study suggest that there may be several nuanced layers to this inclusionary/exclusionary paradox. For instance, alongside the fact that Casey's inability to recall primary SAT's may again be demonstrative of such experiences going 'out of date' *and/or* a reminder of the broader workings of memory, we saw how others saw the importance of primary SAT's as being trumped by those taken at secondary school, with the full (systemic) significance of tests/exams only accepted by Alice and Carl when they reached their GCSE's (Pomeroy, 2000). Whilst we might think of this as long-range strategising that offsets the potential for 'damage to the self', when set within the narrative of 'ability' its significance remains stowed within the 'thinking about' and 'processing' of pupils in relation to such measures – to potentially 'fix failure', indirectly, from without. Indeed, we can trace this line through to the fact that even where little significance was assigned to SAT's



and/or young people failed to acknowledge their link to setting, most saw sets as being significant in their own right.

Yet intersecting with this final point, we also saw how others *did* directly tie primary SAT's to 'knocks in confidence' – 'nerve-wracking' tests of 'our abilities' – and the process of being 'split up into groups of how bright you are'. Moreover, we also saw how those taken in year 6 could be tied to fears that not doing well in them would mean being placed in 'bottom' sets at secondary school. Indeed, this formed part of the ways in which value and meaning was assigned to social-structural space, with Cher describing how *being in* middle sets meant she was 'not supposed to be doing that well anyway', and Dan recalling how he 'always felt down' in bottom sets in which he 'played up' because there was no 'point in doing work'. In a connected sense, throughout young people's careers we also explored the ways in which problems with schoolwork and learning could also be experienced socially, as relational elements of being in school that were 'embarrassing', involved feeling 'stupid'/being 'looked down on', and could structure the avoidance of 'help'; the deepening/generation of conflict with teachers; and later, truancy. Whilst we thereby began to unpick problems with schoolwork and learning as potentially shameful and humiliating – 'hidden injuries of class' (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) – which suggested an implicit recognition of selves as 'impossible learners' who were 'struggling', 'unknowing' and 'abnormal', where young people also traced such experience on to forms of misbehaviour it was suggested that this also served to constitute them as 'bad learners' (Youdell, 2006: 99). Yet in contrast, we also saw how the value and meaning attached to *being in* top sets was inscribed within a sense of *being* 'smarter', 'brainy', more 'intelligent' than 'other kids', and how at secondary school this sense of difference/superiority – 'calling' (Brown, 1987) – could also become fused with *becoming* in terms of a sense of greater prospects for 'high paid jobs' and lifestyles, while year 9 SAT's<sup>26</sup> were in turn more generally associated with linear prospects for final setting positions, GCSE outcomes, and the chance of FE.

Through and within all this we can begin to break into the deeper, phenomenological rhythms of schooling as experience – as a fusion of world and self – from which we can make a number of points that return to Reay & William's (1999; Reay, 2001, 2006) paradox as a centre of gravity. Indeed, as we have seen in relation to education professionals, the stock rationale for measuring and processing pupils in terms of 'ability' was that it provided a way of closely matching teaching to 'ability', and thereby allowed pupils to 'achieve at the right

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<sup>26</sup> Note that Year 9 SAT's were scrapped as of July 2009.

level'. Whilst we have also seen how this is currently inscribed within ITT and traced out the intersecting ways in which a narrative of 'ability' is galvanised and held in place by the market form, the corresponding seams of young people's accounts begin to tally with the narrative of 'social constructivism'. Indeed, these facets of schooling are experienced socially, and thinking in terms of secondary effects, what our findings offer here are snatches of a sense of boundaries and limitations, possibilities and potentials – 'horizons for action' (Ball *et al*, 2000) that render the fetishisation of 'standards' its own antithesis. In this respect, although we must be weary of the influence of interceding memory, we can begin to discern how from the earliest stages of schooling there are the beginnings of a structure that offers a "sense of ones place": a framework 'to become what one has already been quietly and subtly told that one is' (Charlesworth, 2000: 248). Moreover, whilst we can detect some additional resonance with the notion of an economy of pupil worth, we might stay the full weight of epistemological concerns by pointing to strong adjoining continuities with earlier explorations of primary school 'streaming' and testing (Simon, 1953; Barker-Lunn, 1970; Nash, 1971, 1973).

However, there are important layers of qualification and complexity to pull out from this in ways which move our discussion on. Indeed, our findings also suggest that this kind of experiential impact of primary effects was not necessarily totalising and final, or for some, felt as any kind of (direct) injury at all. For instance, beyond her mum's failed attempts to have her tested for dyslexia, we saw how Tam initially saw her being in bottom at primary school as a 'good thing', with this sentiment yielding as her academic progress remained the same. Whilst her feelings shifted again when she was eventually moved to an in-house 'special unit' with other 'disruptive pupils' in which she developed 'a bond'/'trust' with its two teachers and made progress, given the sense of frustration she directed at her schooling following the subsequent uncovering of her dyslexia we might read these facets of experience through the lens of 'symbolic violence' – a misrecognition of her scholastic being which imposed itself as an accurate perceptual schema (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Working with the same theoretical lens, in contrast, Gemma's problems with schoolwork and learning were spotted, and whilst we saw how being in 'special' English and maths was described in terms of a stripping away of her scholastic being – 'not very clever', 'never liked using my brain... just gave up' – her receipt of this help overlapped with her desire to avoid bottom sets at secondary school, and her going on to do well in the year 6 SAT's which saw her move up into top sets where she befriended the girl that would go on to steer her choice-making. Yet alongside Gemma's description of herself becoming 'more intellectually able' at secondary school, highlighting once again the potential for experiences to go 'out-of-date', we might also

tentatively read her shifting scholastic position and sentiment in relation to an *opportunity to shift*: in relation to the support Tam did not receive, and which may well have played into the revalidation of her ‘brain’ and reordering of her ‘horizons for action’. Finally, following his mum’s failed attempt to move him vertically through social-structural space after being reassigned from top to bottom set maths, we saw how this intersected with a house move that brought the opportunity for him to move horizontally and start again at a new school in which he felt he was treated more fairly. Taken together, whilst these vignettes serve in highlighting the sometimes ‘serendipitous nature of... ‘careership’ (Ball *et al*, 2000: 31), they also at once suggest and sensitise us to the shifting relationships and responses – secondary effects – to primary effects. However, beyond this there are some broader points to begin tracing out here. Indeed, in relation to primary schooling, we also saw how the importance of friendship could influence feelings about sets, and how this appeared to gently begin coming together with a sense of primary effects *simultaneously offering* a framework for friendship. In this respect, we saw how Leon explained a request to move from top to middle maths in terms of academic difficulties *and* the fact of his friends being in the latter; how Shelly ‘wasn’t fussed’ about sets as long as she was with her friends; and how Dean expressed similar sentiments whilst also pointing out that although ‘people did mix and match’, ‘each table was a group of friends’ – ‘the funny ones on the not so clever table’, the ‘middle table’, ‘the higher’.

What we begin bringing together in this last layer of discussion is a sense of the processural struggles over the authoring of careers and the making of educational/selves; the constant settling, stirring, and playing out of the potential for class-based educational experiences and outcomes which nonetheless remains set within a structure or framework of meaning offered up by primary effects – the beginnings of a hanging together of SAT’s, set’s and mates. However, as we recall, whilst this relationship appeared to be relatively nascent and loose at primary school, in relation to secondary school it formed a dominant component of young people’s narratives. Whilst we might again flag up the dynamics of memory here, we can point to a resonance with other research which has also discerned the swelling salience of the relationships between in/formal worlds of school as pupils move through the years (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 1977; Ball, 1981; Brown, 1987). Indeed, beginning with broad strokes, we saw how ‘getting to know’ new classmates – ‘who’s who’ – was a key opening concern of secondary careers, and whilst not always ‘set’ from the offset or at all for some subjects, setting nonetheless provided the dominant lens through which the social terrain was mapped out – a framework for pupils ‘taking’ other pupils’ identities (Ball, 1981: 37). Through and within this we picked up clear echoes from earlier work in terms of the way in

which those at the scholastic extremes constructed themselves and others, pointing out how beyond ‘calling’, top sets were experienced as faster, harder and more demanding lessons that left less room for misbehaviour, whilst for those beyond them, top set pupils were wrought through derogatory portrayals as being ‘proper clever’, ‘nerds’, ‘dorks’, and ‘gorms’ who had few if any interests beyond school and strictly adhered to codes of behaviour and dress (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 1977; Ball, 1981; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). However, surrogates of class also circulated through readings of this coming together of the in/formal world of school, with Shelly describing top set pupils as being from ‘really posh families’, whilst Cher gathered together their being from ‘Holbury’, ‘Daddy’s’ educational/occupational plans for them, and their being ‘stuck up’. At the same time, we also saw how for those *both* within and beyond slower paced bottom sets, the distinguishing feature was that those within them embodied an attitude in which school and education held little value and ‘pissing about’ was prioritised. Through and alongside this lack of positive schoolwork ethic, class surfaced here through the language of ‘Chav’, largely decoupled from its wider aesthetic associations with a particular working class subcultural style (Hayward & Yar, 2006; McCulloch et al, 2006; Nayak, 2006), and more readily tied to a way of being/behavioural traits/infringements that called up the ‘rough family’ and the ‘council estate’ as well as smoking, truanting, hanging around/drinking on the streets after school, and failure to adhere to clothing and make-up/jewellery standards.

Heeding Brown’s (1987) warning, it is not the intention here to reify a ‘bi-polar model’ of fused in/formal worlds, and we should point out that an ethnographic approach may have been more closely attuned to a medley of ‘ideal-type’ social-structural positions. Yet in also following Mac an Ghaill’s (1994: 54) intersecting concerns that ideal-types can themselves reify what is in fact ‘fluid and ill-defined’, in following on from the above terrain, ensuing discussion is also not intended to represent a fetishisation of complexity (Ball *et al*, 2000). Rather, what the findings above offer is a glimpse of some of the broad informal structures of meaning attached to social-structural space, and from amongst which young people’s careers were worked out. In particular, the scholastic poles appeared to function as stigmas and/or penalties which could surface in ways that resonated with other accounts of the ambivalence, costs, and losses which educational success can involve for working class pupils (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005; Reay, 2006; Ingram, 2009, 2011), often in turn intersecting with the rolling complexity of careers. For instance, like those of McCulloch *et al*’s (2006) study of youth subcultures, where the language of ‘Chav’ was used it functioned largely as an Othering label, and in the context of

this study, a term through which young people attempted to sever their own behaviour/scholastic positions from the full weight of its meaning. At the same time, we saw how relatively high achieving top set pupil Macey enriched the structure of meaning which stigmatised top set pupils by labelling ‘the majority’ of her school as ‘Chavs’ given their association with the inventory of constitutive behaviours which she felt were pre-requisites of the popularity she was ‘looked down on’ for lacking. In terms of our broader theoretical framework, this appeared to map on to a tension between popularity and success which echoes MacDonald & Marsh’s (2005: 55) findings that for the working class young people of their study, ‘inclusion’ in the formal life of school could mean effective ‘exclusion’ from informal friendship groups’. For instance, here we saw how the ‘turbulence’ of Zac’s family’s successive relocations appeared to embroil him in a ‘quest for self value’ with the *right kind* of peers that mitigated against ‘knuckling down’ (Brown, 2011: 95); and how the stigmas of ‘nerdy’ top sets played into John’s attempt to strike a ‘balance’ between ‘education and having a laugh’ that ultimately cost him in terms of his original position at the top of the scholastic order. Yet at the same time, we also saw how Gemma and Mike appeared to have greater relative success in reaching for the social-structural middle ground. Given the unsociability/superiority of ‘really clever’ top set pupils, the former presented cleverness as only truly desirable and respectable when coupled with/balanced by popularity, ‘envying’ (from her initial position ‘around the bottom’) those just below top who could ‘have a laugh and do their work’, whilst also citing the distance she lived from peers as key to the completion of homework (rather than going out) which saw her become ‘more intellectually able’ and more like those she ‘envied’. In turn, we saw how Mike ‘made a reputation’ for himself with teachers via concerns to get to know people following the ‘turbulence’ of his late arrival in year 7; ongoing difficulties with schoolwork/reluctance to ask for help/subsequent lack of class work; and his taking ‘the easy way out’ of difficulties with top set maths in year 9 by truanting. Whilst he managed to get things ‘back on track’ and ‘buckle down’ after losing the chance to do his maths GCSE early, he explained how subsequently being made a prefect risked being ‘singled out as one of the nerds’ which he suggested was offset by both his being a smoker – having ‘a foot in both sides’ – and the fact that many people ‘started going serious’ and ‘buckled down’ when beginning their GCSE’s at the start of year 10.

However, from this, we again steer into layers of intersecting qualification and complexity which draw out the additional, variegated, and changing axes through, within, and against which schooling careers took shape. For instance, for a number of young people, problems with schoolwork/learning or the National Curriculum continued to constitute them as blends of

‘bad’ and/or ‘impossible learners’ in ways that appeared either to form a temporal/discrete facet of their careers, or to be more independently defining (Youdell, 2006). For instance, whilst Mike got ‘back on track’, we saw not only how he initially continued to experience problems with schoolwork/learning as humiliating (‘embarrassing’), but how it was taking the ‘easy way out’ (truanting) of emerging difficulties in top set maths which cost him the chance to do his GCSE early which in turn came to underpin his ‘buckling down’. Whilst this tallies with MacDonald & Marsh’s (2005: 57-58) findings that beyond the influence of bullying and peers, some pupils ‘struggled to cope with the difficulty of schoolwork and [that] feelings of failure could be avoided – at least in the pressure of the moment – by escaping school’, Casey and Shelly’s accounts eased closer to those for whom it was the ‘whole experience that they found dull or uninspiring’. Indeed, as we recall, choosing to follow her sister to secondary school, Casey pulled close to her older peers, intersecting with what appeared to be an acutely fragile learning identity in bottom sets where, rather than avoidance of help, its finite availability appeared to tip her into a frustrated boredom for which the truancy encountered via her older peers provided an early alternative, defining a secondary career that would see her leave school with no qualifications. In turn, we saw how it was boredom – the fact that ‘there was nothing interesting... just led you off track’ – which held both ends of Shelly’s narrative together, and we unpicked the ways in which this appeared to de-anchor her from what Brown (1987: 75) describes as the ‘basic exchanges commonly operating in school (i.e. compliance to obtain interesting/useful knowledge)’. For instance, she smoked, flouted uniform/make-up/jewellery regulations from year 7, and appeared to demand relationships with teachers that frustrated the boundaries of teacher/pupil, adult/child, women/girl, generating levels of conflict with them which led her to avoid most lessons altogether before she was eventually levered into what appeared to be an inadequate under-16s college placement which she failed to complete. Overlapping with and moving on from this, Cher and Carl’s accounts add additional hues to this and preceding layers of discussions. Indeed, echoing findings from other work (Brown, 1987; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005), Cher tied her truancy from certain subjects to perceived future use-value, suggesting a segmented pattern of both strategic acceptance *and* total rejection of school. Moreover, marrying up with Carl’s account we can make some speculative points about setting here. For instance, set against her earlier accounts of primary school SAT’s and sets, Cher described her being in middle and bottom at secondary with ‘complete div’s’ as being ‘better’ because the teachers ‘treated everyone the same’. From this, we might infer that rather than going ‘out-of-date’, some injurious experiences gave way to acceptance and normalisation, and/or that in contrast to the *intra*-classroom sets of primary schooling where variations in curriculum and teacher-pupil interaction are highly visible, the

more calibrated nature of educational differentiation at secondary school may make classrooms appear to be more coherent, egalitarian, and experientially ‘normal’ in the context of less range. Moreover, whilst Carl was like many others in experiencing bottom set/‘help’ as a symbolic reference to ‘dumbness’, he suggested that being in top sets for maths (although moved down later for lack of homework) and PE provided a counterweight to such feelings by reminding him that he ‘wasn’t actually dumb’. In this respect, whilst it is a point seldom made, given that many young people straddled (to varying degrees) the setting hierarchy for different subjects, we might tentatively infer that occupying multiple positions within the scholastic order can underpin learning identities characterised by dualisms and hybridity – potentially shifting amalgams and balances of heterogeneity and contradiction.

- *‘It’s the rest of your life’: Being Levered-out & Buckling Down.*

We begin to broaden out again here given that in many respects, young people’s accounts of their final years of schooling began to converge, or at least fall more closely into ‘groups’, with some clear themes and points of overlap and separation emerging in relation to existing work (Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; O’Donnell & Sharpe, 2000; Ball *et al*, 2000; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). Indeed, over two decades on from *Learning to Labour* (1977), Willis (2004: 182) suggested that it was likely that he ‘caught “the lads” at the last gasp of a certain kind of real, if subordinated, working class power and celebration in England; almost from the moment the book was published, the conditions got worse’. It was within such conditions that Brown (1987) was looking beyond ‘the lads’ to the invisible majority of ‘ordinary’ working class pupils in South Wales, whose class cultural response to schooling was based on an instrumental acceptance of school as necessary to their ‘getting on’ in working class terms. Whilst Brown (*ibid*, 2004: 175) saw the erosion of working class school-to-work transitions as undermining this wide scale compliance so as to ‘pose the biggest threat to the school in the late 1980’s’, at the turn of the new millennium, O’Donnell & Sharpe (2000: 46) pointed out that only a ‘minority of young people’ were leaving education at 16, with their study of those in London also suggesting that ‘the collective sense of security and confidence of the previous generation had gone. Although some of them were bored with school and wanted badly to move on, few expressed the contempt for education shown by the boys of Willis’ study’. As with their research, amongst the young people of this study there was a widespread perception that school was vital for ‘getting on’ within or ‘getting out’ of the working class in terms of occupational futures (Brown, 1987).

However, we immediately enter into some methodological tangles here which demand that we tread cautiously. Indeed, whilst earlier work has often focused upon or identified those at the bottom of the scholastic order as an anti-school subcultural point of contrast for other positions, as we recall, only Dan, Casey and Tam were exclusively located as such, with Matt, Tristan, Alice and Macey at the other end of the scale, and the remainder straddling the hierarchy to different extents at different times. Moreover, it has tentatively been suggested that this may be key in accounting for/producing multifaceted, hybrid and contradictory learning identities which are nonetheless played out within a broad structure of meaning which we have explored, albeit crudely, in ‘bi-polar’ terms. Yet the small number of those who were exclusively at the bottom of the scholastic order were also crosscut by the fact that Dan was permanently excluded from school at the start of year 10, Casey’s career was defined by truancy, and like many of the young people of MacDonald & Marsh’s (2005) study, in the final instance, both read the outcomes of their schooling through the lens of regret. In this respect, at one level our sample/retrospective approach may have failed to have tapped into significant structurally fractured degrees of difference in the final years of schooling. However, with this in mind, in and of themselves, and in relation to the rest of our sample, on the study’s own terms we can still draw out a number of key insights into the final years of schooling as a key axis of careers.

Indeed, from the offset, in attuning ourselves to the ‘changing bases of time and space’ within which careers are made (Ball *et al*, 2000: 18), we have reached for young people’s accounts and perspectives on their schooling. In this respect, we have seen how Dan’s *being in* ‘bottom’ formed a key facet of his *being in* school (‘I guess that’s why I played up... no point doing the work’), and how this was in turn crosscut by intra-class bullying rooted in his ‘proximity to poverty’, underpinning a defensive hypermasculinity that defined his secondary schooling from which he was formally excluded. For Shelly, it was the National Curriculum’s failure to offer anything of interest that appeared to set in motion the being in school which, at the start of year 10, saw her offered an under-16 college place for year 11. In the final instance then, Dan and Shelly were ‘bad’, ‘impossible learners’ (Youdell, 2006), and we might tentatively read their ultimate exclusion in terms of their potential threats to performativity (disruption to others/sapping resources) which Ball (1998) has explored as an additional node of the ‘new moral environment’ of the market. Moreover, whilst they may in some respects constitute archetypal fodder for the narrative of ‘deficiency’, both clearly read their parents as valorising education and recounted dissonance which their being in school brought at home, deflecting attention back onto the rhythms of schooling – the primacy of primary effects, the content of



schooling, and the wider influence of poverty within schools. Alongside Casey's problems with schoolwork/learning, the finite availability of help, the development of a 'habit of not going', and Tam's unnoticed dyslexia/prioritisation of 'pissing about', these facets of experience appeared to limit who these young people could be in school and what school could be for them. Within this, whilst Shelly came closest to an 'anti-school' 'alienated orientation' (Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987), she straddled middle and bottom sets, and beyond the subsequent regret all three felt, Casey's recollection of frustration at the limited availability of help in bottom sets and Dan's account of carrying himself in a way which offset the public humiliation of Year 9 SAT's results makes it less easy to 'read' them as 'anti-school'. Moreover, whilst Zac was alone in echoing 'the lad's' or 'rem's' by way of his early offer of work/a place in the army eroding the final importance of schooling, he differed in that his being in school had previously been caught between the in/exclusions of the in/formal worlds that checked his efforts to 'knuckle down', rather than defining him as 'anti-school'.

Yet for the remainder of young people, entering the final stages of their schooling careers meant that they increasingly engaged – albeit with different degrees of success – in efforts to 'swot' (Brown, 1987) for their GCSE's in ways which could involve shifts and changes of direction in relation to prior orientations. For instance, as the only exclusively bottom set pupil of our sample to remain in school and sit her final exams, we saw how despite Tam's unnoticed dyslexia and prioritisation of 'pissing about', GCSE's 'shat' her 'right up' – she wanted 'to do well... get a proper job, go to college and not be... on the side of the road begging just because I mucked about in school'. Although 'gutted' about the 'crap' results she achieved, Tam recounted how she got her 'head down'. Whilst similar shifts came for Carl, Dean, and Mike, for Cher we saw how her nan's recovery and grandfathers retirement not only allowed her to refocus on school, but how her mum's not finishing school provided a negative reference point through which 'it all just kicked in', returning with the support of two friends and 'trying hard' to catch up and avoid 'coming out... with nothing' by selectively engaging with those subjects where teachers were 'willing to put in the time' because she was 'close to' them. Indeed, as we recall, with the final exception of Zac, young people increasingly came to explicitly subscribe to the importance of links between SAT's, sets, GCSE success, and linear ties between the tone and texture of the 'rest of you life', regularly referring to a 'pressure' indicative of a heightened sense of what was at stake. In this respect, schooling was seen to play a determining role in occupational futures both in terms of making it to FE/HE and, in a connected sense, avoiding a life of unskilled manual labour which was written into divisions between being a 'tramp' or 'trolley pusher', and the chance of getting a 'good job' or 'proper

job'. Here there was also a sense that securing 5 A\*-C GCSE's measured in league tables was a crucial and 'basic minimum', that those results that fell below the threshold not constituting 'proper' GCSE's, or at the very least, that it was vital to leave school with 'something rather than nothing'. Yet we also saw how for some, this air of there being 'no alternative to obtaining credentials of some sort' (Aronowitz, 2004: xi) had begun to mingle with the rumblings of economic recession - how immediate entry to the jobs market was unviable ('not many jobs') and unthinkable without qualifications ('you've got to do well to get somewhere nowadays'), with John contrasting the relative emptiness of 'out there' with 'staying on' to at the very least become more 'knowledgeable'.

Yet from within all this we can pull out some broad fractures in terms of post school pathways and plans. Indeed, as we saw, whilst the army did not work out for Zac, and Casey had been 'locked up' for a time shortly after officially leaving school, like Tam, Dan, Shelly and Cher, the lens of regret appeared to resonate with the messages from parents that schools were meritocratic, and through either Connexiones or the KTS training centres they were engaged in efforts to credentialise as pre-requisites for labour market entry. However, in many respects, they nonetheless remained on the fringes of the 'learning society', 'outside of the 'high-skills economy'', and appeared to be caught within different 'opportunity structures' to those of their peers (Ball *et al*, 2000: 117). Indeed, in contrast, beyond anxieties about securing 'the 5' pre-requisite A\*-C GCSE's, Gemma, Alice, Macey and Matt planned to take the traditional academic route through 'A' Levels, university and on into professional jobs such as nursing, teaching, journalism and forensic science, bringing them closer to the 'swots' of Brown's (1987: 105) study for whom education provided a way of 'getting out' of the working class and into lives that were 'educationally, occupationally and socially distinct from the majority of working class parents, neighbours and peers'. Yet we might also tentatively read Carl, Dean, Mike and Tim's as centring around reconfigured efforts to 'get on' in working class terms (Brown, 1987) within 'new' socio-economic times (O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000; Ball *et al*, 2000). Indeed, against a backdrop of absent or fragmented and uncertain routes into traditional male working class jobs, O'Donnell & Sharpe (2000: 152) found that many of the young males of their study were looking towards new vocational/occupational structures in media, business and sport, noting that 'subjective feelings of risk' have run parallel to what appears to be an ever widening and bewildering array of 'choices' and 'routes' into employment. In this respect, at one level we might unpick the replacement of Carl's lifelong aim to be a professional footballer with plans to take a vocational route into PE teaching, and Dean, Mike, and Tim's plans to enter the armed forces as reaching for shades of traditional,

masculine, heroic, secure working class employment. In relation to the latter three, whilst parents were not connected to the military, Brookes (2011: 36) notes that ‘non-officer recruits’ continue to be disproportionately drawn from the working class, and it may be likely that recent military campaigns have raised its appeal. Yet unlike Zac, whilst neither of them had made early applications and secured places, for Dean the army appeared to be an answer to uncertainty and indecision (‘a safe bet for teens who don’t know what they’re doing’), whilst for Mike it appeared to offer the most straightforward route to (the lifelong aim) of becoming a vet which negated the entry requirements, time, expense and uncertainties of HE. Taken together with Tim’s aim of becoming a pilot, we might read his, Mikes and Carl’s plans in terms of ‘imagined futures’ and strategies that reach for social mobility on working class terms (Ball *et al*, 2000: 30).

In relation to this seam of findings we can pull out some complimentary distinctions and overlaps which, notwithstanding those young people who were in various forms excluded before the final significance/impact of GCSE’s might have been felt (Dan, Shelly, Casey), may go some way in accounting for ‘swotting’ whilst also bolstering a broader argument in relation to New Labour’s ‘supply-side egalitarianism’. Indeed, in contrast to our findings from two urban locales in the South West of England, MacDonald & Marsh’s (2005: 64-65) examination of young working class people’s experiences of growing up in East Kelby, Teesside, found that the validity of the ‘traditional educational contract’ was weak, with displays of the alienated instrumentality of Brown’s ‘ordinary kids’ not only ‘less common’ than in his study, but ‘less capable of withstanding the counter-claim of a more disaffected point of view that directly contested the ‘education = jobs’ equation’ consistent with ‘rems’, or indeed, Willis’ ‘lads’. In turn, comparing their findings to O’Donnell & Sharpe’s (2000) London based study, MacDonald & Marsh (2005: 64) follow Brown in stressing the importance of localised constellations of employment opportunities in structuring the latter years orientations to schooling of working class young people, with significant numbers of those in East Kelby seemingly aware that there was ‘little substantive difference between the post-school careers of the most and least qualified’. In this respect, the young people of this study were certainly geographically and temporally situated within local economies which were not only broadly booming, but enjoyed some of the lowest unemployment rates in the UK (ONS, 2008). Moreover, as we have seen, where the early signs of recession did surface in our findings, they appeared to imbue a sense that getting ‘the 5’ was more pressing, linking the dynamics between economy and education with an increased need to credentialise. This may be key in explaining how despite earlier examinations of the costs and losses involved in

orientations within the overlapping in/formal worlds of school, the majority of participants 'started going serious' in the way Mike suggested had contributed to his relatively successful occupation of the social structural middle ground. In the final instance then, from the perspective of pupils and in relation to efforts to raise 'standards', despite the variegated success of final efforts to 'swot' our findings also suggest that the structure and scope of post-school opportunities forms part of the dynamics of young people's final orientations to school.

***Teachers: Points of Conflict & 'Making a Difference'.***

Although difficult to have weaved an adequate sense of it into preceding discussions, as we recall, conflictual and/or problematic relationships with teachers were a constant for many young people, appearing to shadow and/or come together through a dense medley of intersections. Indeed, in relation to primary school we saw how Mike, Tam and Carl's accounts of problems with schoolwork and learning suggested that being a less than 'ideal learner' in academic terms could feed into becoming a 'bad learner' in behavioural terms (Youdell, 2006). At the same time, alongside assignment to devalued lower sets (Dan's 'playing up') and alienation from schoolwork (Shelly - 'nothing interesting... led you off-track'), this could also intersect with homework to generate/deepen conflict with teachers in ways which were in turn circularly linked to problems with schoolwork and learning (Tam, Casey, Dan), a valued division between home and school (Dan, Dean, Zac, Carl), and/or the limited ability of parents to act as educators at home (Cher, Dan, Tam). At secondary school these dynamics largely continued, spilling into truancy for Casey, Cher, Shelly and Mike, whilst also appearing to recede in relation to homework as the wider significance of GCSE's loomed increasingly close (Pomeroy, 2000). In turn, whilst we have also seen how the prioritisation of getting to know peers following the 'turbulence' of house moves could feed into 'reputations' (Zac, Mike) (Brown, 2011), Cher's nan's illness and Carl's dad's death also placed clear strains upon their relations with teachers. Moreover, whilst we have explored the complexities of Dan, Casey and Tam's arriving and remaining exclusively in bottom sets and pointed out that many others had experienced or remained in them for some subjects, we have also seen how these social-structural spaces were themselves associated with a prioritisation of 'pissing about', and the intersecting ways in which young people could also be caught between in/exclusions of the in/formal worlds of schooling (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). Yet alongside this inventory of points of conflict, like those of Pomeroy's (2000) study of permanently excluded working class pupils, young people appeared to be particularly sensitive to differential treatment deemed to be unjustified, whilst at secondary school also shifting into

complaints about inconsistent enforcement of discipline and control which in many respects served to undermine the narrative of ‘deficiency’ by reassigning agency to teachers.

Indeed, whilst for Carl and Dan at primary school and John and Mike at secondary school there were feelings of being overpoliced in relation to peers, there were more widespread frustrations surrounding ‘favouritism’. At primary school we saw how ‘prizes and awards and trips for the best pupils’, ‘help’, being chosen to answer questions, the humiliation of being last in class to be allowed to begin using a pen, and being treated less favourably outside of top set had stuck in the minds of Tim, Macey, Gemma and Cher as unfair treatment rooted in favouritism. Echoed again at secondary school, we explored Matt’s experience of being a non/favourite, describing it as being about not/getting ‘a look-in’ on the grounds of being non/‘gifted’. Moreover, like Matt, Tristan was assigned exclusively to top sets in which both of them appeared to have had an acute sense of what was at stake in relation to teachers’ favour, with the latter viewing Year 9 SAT’s as of heightened importance given that his teachers ‘tend[ed] to care more’ and be ‘more friendly to clever people’ while the former suggested that behaviour could also determine if you got ‘help’ or had a ‘hard time getting anywhere’. In turn, whilst we began to unpick these as readings of teacher-pupil relations as contractually rooted in understandings of the way in which the former perceive the latter in terms of ‘ability’ and ‘behaviour’, we also saw how Shelly viewed the lines of division/prioritisation this opened up as feeding into a provocative situation in which teachers would not ‘care’ and ‘leave you to do what you want’. This not only married-up with the sentiments of other young people that behavioural issues were related to weaknesses in teaching practice, but in turn begins to resonate with the accounts of education professionals, both in terms of the different expectations/‘attitudes’ they had for different sets and in relation to mis/behaviour being related to the mechanics of teaching. For instance, as we saw, young people had a deep dislike of teachers shouting as a way of attempting to discipline and maintain control, viewing it instead as a *loss* of control that could be as provocative as failures to consistently enforce rules.

However, drawing upon education professional’s own language, at an individual level the qualities of teachers appeared to be key in ‘making a difference’ for young people. In relation to primary school we saw how Gemma’s reception year teacher was key to her settling in while the ‘shouty’ nature of those at a school which she latter moved to making her feel ‘really insecure’; how despite Shelly’s general curricular alienation she learned with the few teachers she ‘got on with’; and how despite her unnoticed dyslexia, the ‘bond’/‘trust’ Tam built up with the two teachers in her schools ‘special unit’ for ‘disruptive pupils’ also allowed her to make

progress in her learning. Similarly, just as Tam worked this through the importance of her 'knowing' these teachers and them 'knowing'/'how to take' her, Dan gathered together class-imbued shorthand's of 'snobyness', 'poshness', and their living in a particular geographical area when describing how his teachers 'didn't know how to control' him, recounting in turn how he had behaved differently for the one teacher who 'asked' rather than 'told' him how to behave. To this we might also add both Cher's suggestion that in the context of not being able to draw on help at home, the irony of homework being rooted in this assumption that you could was that 'that's when you need a teacher most', and that against the 'sarcasm' of most, it was only through those that Cher felt 'close to' that she able to selectively refocus on her GCSE following her nan's illness.

Taking these findings together we can draw out a number of key points and overlaps here. Indeed, at one level, we might begin by setting the centring of young people's assessments of teachers in terms of their inter-personal qualities against Mac an Ghaill's (1994) explorations of the middle class 'Real Englishman' of his study who 'evaluated teachers and students in terms of their possession of high-status cultural capital'. In turn, in exploring all the points and provocations of teacher-pupil conflict it is also important to stay mindful of the way in which education professionals not only suggested that behaviour combined with 'ability' to determine assignment to sets, but how the behaviour/nature of working class pupils could also be explained through a narrative of 'deficiency' which appeared to erode the agency of teachers and schools. In conjunction with findings suggesting that young people read their parents/carers as underlining the kind of comportment schools and teachers expected of pupils, this final layer of findings further problematise the narrative of 'deficiency' and MUD, and perhaps come closer to a resonance with the facet of the narrative of 'social constructivism' in which technical and procedural weaknesses in the mechanics of teaching were seen as generating misbehaviour as a 'response to boredom'. Yet young people's centring on the inter-personal qualities of teachers also begin to go beyond this, offering a sense of the kinds of teaching relationships they wanted, needed and that worked for them. Indeed, via the fact that 'making a difference' and shared criticisms of favouritism/disciplinary inconsistency were circulated through and in relation to the language of 'fairness', mutual 'respect', the importance of 'knowing' and having 'things in common' with teachers, we can again trace strong parallels with the young people of Pomeroy's (2000: 49-50) study who responded best to those who 'abandoned a distant teacher-student relationship model in favour of a certain type of friendship model' that 'could bridge the gap between 'friendship' and discipline'.

# 10

## **Conclusions & Beyond.**

This study has sought to explore the continuing significance of class within schools at a time when its structural pertinence has been paralleled by an erosion of class as ‘a self-conscious principle of social identity’ (Savage, 2000: xii). At the same time, it has attempted to engage with the parallel ascendancy of thinking about class in ways which are increasingly euphemised, covert, and decoupled from structural engagement, positioning its associated inequalities in terms of personal and cultural deficiencies. Yet in taking shape at a time when thinking about inequality and disadvantage had been dominated by policy and academic discourses of social exclusion, it has also sought to engage with New Labour’s political philosophy and policy approach to education. In this respect, alongside the ‘paradox of class’ we have also worked at the face of further contradictory efforts to generate a more ‘Inclusive Society’ via an education system organised around exclusive market principles. However, in a broader sense we have set all this within a long-view of the relationship between class and state education, positioning the shifting contours, aims, purposes and control of schooling as deeply political. In particular, we have paid close attention to the development of the current structure of provision; how this was rooted not only in hostility to the perceived egalitarianism of the comprehensive era which was seen to of depressed ‘standards’, but a connected mistrust of teachers who marketisation was intended to guard against in conjunction with tighter control of their pre-service preparation. Working through and amongst all this, we have sought to complicate and think through these contextual layers, exploring how and in what ways class continues to circulate within schools; how working class pupils and the conditions and shaping of their schooling are understood by teachers; and how working class children and young people experience contemporary schooling along multiple axes of time and space.

Whilst we have tied many of our findings to long-lines of research that render this study significant as a marker of continuity amongst change, in this respect, what we have essentially generated are a series of glimpses into the ways in which old inequalities are re/made within the ‘new’ social, economic, and political landscapes in which compulsory schooling was located during the opening decade of the early twenty-first century. What we have seen are some of the contemporary yet enduring ways in which class is called-up, fits together with,

and is read, lived and re/produced in relation to schooling; how the two find a rhythm, a balance: a pattern that strains to congeal around layers of tacit - yet uneasy and unstable - iniquitous 'reconciliations'. Indeed, what this study clearly reiterates is the deeply ambiguous and contradictory nature of schooling as it relates to class, offering insights into its contemporary circulation in relation to policy, practice, and experience. Informed by 'new' directions in class analysis, our qualitative approach has in this respect revealed class to circulate in a ubiquitous and shifting fashion, surfacing in different ways and guises to serve different functions, and to continually re/make class amongst crosscutting layers and shades of in/exclusions.

Yet class in terms of the complexities that we have reached for and explored is inscribed as a silence within education policy and the sanitised structures and processes it stokes up. They are two superimposed systems in which the latter blanks the former, reducing it to a shadowy by-product and/or engaging in double-shuffles that at once outsource responsibility to parents whilst also overburdening schools with transformative expectations rooted in the very same silence. The political de-politicisation of ITT reflects this, born out in our study as a disjuncture between trainees' subjective recognition of the salience of class within schools and its official absence from courses that reduce notions of 'difference' and 'inclusion' to 'ability'. This tessellates and hangs together with the broad logics of the market form within which our study has shown 'ability', 'standards' and class to enter into a medley of tangles. Indeed, in many respects, the complex (historical) relationships between educational and social categories left open within ITT - between 'ability' and class - were at the crux of education professionals' readings of working class pupils and the shaping of their schooling. We have seen how the market underpins a particular performative *raison d'état* that bends the fibres and sinews of schooling to the threats and incentives of consumer choice; how 'ability' forms the raw ingredient of the measurable 'standards' that underpin choice; and how 'ability' thereby forms the key building block for 'thinking about' and 'processing' pupils in an effort to manage league table performance. The long history of predictive sieving and sorting of pupils by 'ability' is recycled, rehashed, and gains an uneasy legitimacy through and within this context, with testing regimes, predictive 'ability' data, and setting by 'ability' positioned as a way of matching teaching to 'ability' for the maximisation of achievement/performance, and for which 'triage' and vocationalisation provide additional and final means.

However, class circulates throughout this as a parallel logic; elastic, sometimes awkward, and yet both reconciled and reconciling. As a relational system of meaning, thought, and action,



the supple qualities of class allow it to be mobilised in different ways as education professionals are caught within the contradictions, dilemmas and pressures of the compulsory education system. At one level it is seen to intersect with parental choice to drive the external dynamics of the zero-sum condition of a schools 'failing', struggling or improving. Yet at the same time, this intersection is evaluated and assessed in moral terms, with contemporary atavisms of working class parental deficiency accounting for the non-choosing that can skew an intake towards their children who are of lesser value in terms of a school's performative *raison d'état*. This initial stirring of a familiar conflation between class and 'ability' is repeated in relation to the internal responses through which schools attempt to maximise performance and reach for improvement, with the social category fracturing both the scholastic order and teachers' perceptions and expectations, whilst otherwise comfortably absorbed and subsumed within a series of corresponding educational categories. This conflation not only helps to square and fit class into its own structure, but to simultaneously reconcile its patterned presence within the structures of compulsory schooling. However, in contrast to the depoliticisation of ITT, whilst education professionals shared a critical unease that 'thinking about' and 'processing' pupils in relation to 'ability' placed limits on what the latter could be and become in schools and narrowed the scope and creativity of teaching and teacher-pupil relations, this constituted a weaker and back-footed foray that followed in the wake of the imperatives to perform that demanded to be dealt with. Yet in remaining mindful of the fact that the broad strokes in which we have worked are likely to have missed the 'micro-autonomous spaces' through and within which education professionals may have worked against this (Wilkins, 2011: 401), we might here field this as an area for further enquiry rooted in an ethnographic oscillation between observation and discussion to trace them out. However, the full weight of their tentative foregrounding of a role for the rhythms of schooling in the making of class was nonetheless blunted and stayed by pliable returns to the deficiencies of working class parents as placing the ultimate brake on what schools and teachers could hope to achieve for/with their children.

This picture problematises the notion of 'performativity and 'standards' at the heart of both the market form and New Labour's wider educational approach to social inclusion. Whilst the zero-sum game is the former's driver of higher 'standards', together with the latter's adjoining hyper-agentification of schools and teachers the two are undercut by the multiple limitations education professionals felt themselves to be set amongst. Indeed, our thinking in terms of social exclusion and inclusion has allowed us to track the shifting ways in which education professionals allotted agency/responsibility for the steering and making of - and conditions of -

working class educational experience. Whilst the drive for higher ‘standards’ underpinned by the performative *raison d’état* could be positioned as its own antithesis and coupled with a desire to knockout its league table lynchpin, crosscutting intersections of class as ‘ability’ and ‘deficiency’ could set deeper, more intractable limits upon ‘standards’. Yet what we have gleaned from looking back over the course of young people’s schooling careers are a series of further glimpses which additionally problematise the idealised workings of the market form; New Labour’s inclusive society; undercut and complicate the readings of education professionals; and sensitise us to both the diverse constancy of class over rolling axes of time and space, and the shifting layers and dimensions of in/exclusion that help to re/make it.

In the first instance, against the flavour of key currents of social exclusion as a political discourse and the accounts of education professionals, we have seen how working class young people read their parents/carers as valorising education. Whilst we have discerned a ‘division of labour’ between home and school rooted within constellations of capital and past educational injustice, this study has also picked up the sense of schoolings’ being a ‘meritocratic’ good through young people’s accounts of their parents/carers’ bolstering of schools’ expectations in relation to comportment. In turn, while the latter foregrounds class in terms of symbolic violence which was perhaps most explicitly traceable within some young people’s final regrets about their being in school, in relation to the former, class was manifest in careers in terms of an absence or withering availability of help with homework. Yet conversely, this ‘division of labour’ was interspersed with unsuccessful parental attempts to intervene directly in school when and where problems arose. A further point of contrast with policy and education professionals arose from the fact that against the instrumental rationality inscribed within the parentocratic market system, many young people were not only in control of their choice-making, but prioritised subjective inclusion in terms of ‘fitting in’ with peers/siblings – a system of value punished when read in terms of the objective educational exclusion wrought through the markets eliding equality of provision. However, even where young people steered away from the bulk of peers they were entangled in other networks of class and in/exclusion: the risks and realities of not ‘getting in’, or the fact of objective educational inclusion being blunted by subjective exclusion that was powerfully inflected by intra/inter-class differences. Yet in relation to the broader structures and processes mapped out by education professionals – and resonating with their critical unease – this study has offered a familiar sense of these institutional rhythms beginning to foster from the earliest moments, a structure of meaning and being in which the shifting complexities of careers are played out, building towards an end in which some peter out before time, a few appear to do relatively

well, while the remainder become embroiled in the looming significance of what will come next.

Indeed, against the desocialisation of education policy and ITT, we have explored contemporary schooling as a *social* experience in the lives of working class young people, and have snatched instances of its complex phenomenological intricacies; the way in which problems with schoolwork and learning, alienation from schoolwork, testing regimes and setting by ‘ability’ can stow a sense of boundaries, limits, particular possibilities and potentials through which class is re/made. Much of the flavour of this renders the contemporary fetishisation of ‘standards’ its own antithesis, re-invoking questions about the adequacy of ongoing support for pupils which is attuned to the dynamics of ‘stigma’; the need for a more inclusive curriculum that does not slide in to vocationalism; and the problematisation of scholastic hierarchies. Indeed, our study has glimpsed facets of the contemporary intertwining of these hierarchies and peer relations, mapping out a social-structural terrain in which class-inflected othering, disidentification and stigma can orbit its extremes and provide a broad structure of meaning which can offer up crosscutting in/exclusionary ‘choices’ for young people in relation to wider social popularity and academic success. However, all this was a broad context in which careers were constantly settling, stirring, and being played out. Different elements could shift in and out of importance at different times, experiences could go ‘out of date’/become normalised, and whilst some careers appeared to solidify and congeal, the fact that many straddled the hierarchy of sets at different times and to different degrees suggested a potential for learning identities to involve shades of dualism and hybridity – potentially shifting amalgams and balances of heterogeneity and contradiction that might provide fertile ground for teachers to continually work within the webs of meaning which envelope working class pupils; for the ‘reconstitution’ of learners within schools (Youdell, 2006: 182).

Moreover, whilst for those who were levered out of schooling early there was a foregrounding of interrelated and ‘defining’ narratives of boredom, problems with schoolwork/learning, poverty, low scholastic position, and truancy, for those that remained, the looming significance of GCSE’s and beyond underpinned a broad re/focusing on school. Bearing in mind concerns about the breadth of our sample, given the relative economic/occupational buoyancy of the study’s locales at the time, this refocusing potentially challenges the broad thrust of New Labour’s ‘supply-side egalitarianism’ by adding tentative weight to arguments that for those at the very hard economic and spatial end of class inequality, the scope and quality of

opportunities after school may be crucial in steering young people's decisions to in/exclude 'themselves' in/from the 'promise of the educational project (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). Additionally, in terms of their relationships with teachers this study has traced multiple capillaries and nodes of conflict which young people experienced, and which were frequently appeared to be related to crosscutting chains of issues – homework, problems with schoolwork/learning, boredom, setting and peer relations – overlapping in turn with the critical facets of education professionals accounts whilst running counter to their parallel foregrounding of parental 'deficiency' in accounting for the nature of working class pupils. Moreover, our findings from young people have suggested that the inter-personal (relational) qualities of teachers were of key importance for them. Whilst iniquitous and/or inconsistent treatment formed the prime concern, this was not only accompanied by indications that blends of friendliness and discipline were most valued, but were also interspersed with instances of teachers being able to 'making a difference' hinging upon this kind of approach. Whilst these insights into working class young people's relationships with teachers might also be explored in greater depth as part of a study that reached for the 'micro-autonomous spaces' of teaching, there are a number of additional directions and footings within this upon which further research might build and re-explore. The voices of parents/carers are the most obvious absence from this study, and future enquiry might again usefully engage in biographical work that explores the shifting complexities of their relationships with their children's schooling. In turn, similar work with middle class young people might provide powerful comparative insights into the different textures of young people's lives. Yet on a similar note, having begun to grapple with some of the complexities of class at the level of everyday life and experience, this foundation might provide a basis for a more holistic engagement with the intersectionalities between class, 'race' and gender - some of the swirling 'identity constellations' through, within and against which lives are re/made .

Against the weight of history and the contemporary direction and scope of the education policy regime it is crucial (yet arguably difficult) to avoid a sense of 'naive possibilitarianism' (Whitty, 2001: 288), and to reach instead for 'complex hope' (Pratt-Adams *et al*, 2010: 4). Whilst also vital to bear in mind Bernstein's (1970: 344) reminder that 'education cannot compensate for society', as and where schools hang across and within society's tangled institutions they nonetheless need to be as good as they can be for all pupils; not in directions that offer 'more of the same', but 'a set of approaches that subvert this way of doing school' (Pratt-Adams *et al*, 2010: 155); not in an overburdened hyper-agentic sense, but through serious engagement with their own internally and externally embedded complexities that

would involve structural, curricular and pedagogic reform. Yet whilst it would be a welcome move to begin any rolling back of the structure of provision that currently galvanises ‘thinking about’ and ‘processing’ pupils in the ways that this study has explored, tacit acceptance of setting by education professionals could potentially mean that any immediate benefits of ‘less market’ would go to teachers, eroding the current nature of pressures to perform as, perhaps, a forerunner of broader reform. Yet straddling this, our study’s tracing out of the deeply embedded projections of inferiority that continue to orbit working class pupils points to a more entrenched set of problems that call up the circular bivalence of class - a node of inequality wrought through mutually reinforcing lines of maldistribution and misrecognition, in which cultural harms stemming from the latter develop ‘a life of their own’ and hamper mobilisation against the former (Fraser, 2004: 234). Brown (2000) reminds us that any move towards a more equitable positive-sum game will in part first hinge upon middle class parents being convinced of the advantages of moving away from a system rooted in positional competition. Whilst Bottery (cited in Ball, 1998: 82) argues that rather than ‘providing a structure for natural inclinations’ markets ‘in fact produce the conditions under which the mentality occurs’, any reform in a more equitable direction would in turn hinge around convincing middle class parents to either share the same educational spaces as their Others, or at least to agree to greater measures of redistribution. Yet even the latter – underpinning many of New Labour’s early-years and area-based interventions – is in and of itself inadequate given that the market form will always demand the making of winners *and* losers (the making of ‘examples’) (Gewirtz, 2001), and the future deepening of markets and education as a positional good is nonetheless solidly inscribed within the Conservative-led Coalition’s flagship drive for Free Schools (DfE, 2010). Moreover, the supranational narrative of international positional competition which ultimately drew, bent and magnetised New Labour’s fetishisation of ‘standards’ also leads the current government, with the OECD’s ranking of the UK’s educational performance underpinning the opening statement of its White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (*ibid*: 9): ‘how we’re doing compared with our international competitors... will define our economic growth and our country’s future’.

Whilst this narrative itself needs to be problematised (Brown & Lauder, 2006), any sharing of educational spaces *and/or* greater measures of resources will still in large part depend upon also problematising and working away at the Othering and stereotypes which offer ‘a purity of hands and conscience’ in expelling people and issues from the ‘moral universe of obligations’ by constructing them as ‘worthless’ (Bauman, 2005: 78, 82; Lister, 2004; Skeggs, 2004: 173). Entangled with this, any structural educational reform would also be inadequate without a

parallel re-valuing of working class pupils and families as a constitutive part of curricular and pedagogic reform. This would be vital for any move away from a curriculum which today bears a strong resemblance to what was in place over 100 years ago (White, 2010) - a move that did not relativise curricula to the point at which it might sever pupils from powerful forms of knowledge (Simon, 1976), but at the same time avoided slides into the familiar academic/vocational divides that help class fit into itself. In this respect, despite the current leanings of international policy borrowing, and Michael Gove's encyclopaedic vision of a 'traditional education with children sitting in rows learning the kings and queens of England' (cited in, Beadle, 2010), the education system of Brazil's Porto Alegre not only provides an example of an alternative wrought through 'thick democratic processes' (Youdell, 2006: 184), but also serves as a reminder that the 'neo-liberal globalising agenda is not inevitable' (Pratt-Adams *et al*, 2010: 80). Yet in pedagogic terms, serious parallel engagement with the social experience of schooling for working class pupils in order to challenge, interrupt, and re/make learners and relations - and appeals that this be made a central skill available through ITT (Youdell, 2006) - look increasingly slim given plans to 'to increase the proportion of time trainees spend in the classroom, focusing on core teaching skills, especially in teaching reading and mathematics, and in managing behaviour' (DfE, 2010: 9). Coupled with the decision to fund only those applicants with degrees of 2:2 or higher, the emphasis upon academic/subject knowledge ('skills') as the primary attribute of good quality teachers continues to marginalise considerations of 'how they think and what attitudes they hold' (Evans, 2011: 861; Maguire, 2011). Yet whilst on the part of academics there is a continued 'need to reinvigorate class analysis' - to resuscitate it as being much more than an economic category; to interrogate privilege, entitlement, 'normality', power, and their defuse re/making (Skeggs, 2004: 186) - in the toing and froing of future wins and losses over equity, the wider task remains one of ceaselessly reminding 'those who choose, for whatever reason, to settle for second or third best [that they] are not entitled to the comforting illusion that what they have opted for amounts to social justice.' (Callinicos, 2000: 104).

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20<sup>th</sup> April 2009

As part of a PhD programme funded by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), I am currently researching some of the difficulties associated with the teaching and learning of disadvantaged children and young people in the English secondary system. With a particular focus on issues related to social exclusion and social class, the research explores the dynamic interplay between teachers as front-line mediators of education policy, and the educational experiences of children and young people.

Whilst part of my fieldwork will involve teacher practitioners and young people nearing the end of their compulsory educational careers, I am also interested in interviewing a sample of PGCE students in the throws of their ITT. In this respect, I am particularly keen to explore your thoughts around the implications of educational and societal processes for disadvantaged learners alongside the unfolding influence of your ITT.

Taking part in the study will involve a relaxed and informal one-to-one interview lasting approximately one hour to be held either on campus or at the location you find most convenient. During this time you will be invited to share your views and experiences in relation to the study's core focus. Your identity will be treated with the strictest of confidence at all times and will not be disclosed in any final reports or publications. A payment of £15 will also be made for your time.

If you are interested in taking part in the study or finding out any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [wmr20@bath.ac.uk](mailto:wmr20@bath.ac.uk) or phone - 07988 419575.

Thank you very much indeed for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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13<sup>th</sup> July 2009.

Dear .....

My name is Will Roberts and I'm a researcher based at the University of Bath. I'm working on a project which explores the educational experiences of school-leavers in and around your area and have asked \*\*\*\*\* School to pass this letter on to you to see if you are interested in taking part.

As you recently left school, I'm interested in hearing about what your time at school has been like and how you feel it may have influenced your life so far. It doesn't matter whether you liked or disliked school or found it inspiring or boring – if you're interested in taking part then I'm interested in hearing from you.

Getting involved in the project would involve an easy-going interview in which you would be invited to share your thoughts and experiences of school. Any information you gave wouldn't be passed on to or used by anyone else but me, and your personal identity would remain protected at all times. For taking part I would also be able to leave you with £15 gift voucher in order to thank you for your time and contribution.

If you're interested in taking part in the project or finding out any further information then please feel free to contact me either by completing and sending back the pre-paid postcard, by email at [wmr20@bath.ac.uk](mailto:wmr20@bath.ac.uk) or by phoning/texting me on 07988 419575.

Thanks very much indeed for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

.....



## **Interview Schedule: PGCE Students.**

### ***Personal Information.***

- Can I begin by asking how old you are?
- What did you do before deciding to become a teacher?
  - Work?
  - Study?

### ***Initial/Warm-Up Questions.***

- What brought you to teaching?
- What kinds of expectations did you have?
  - Rewards?
  - Challenges?
- What role did you see education as playing in the lives of students?
  - Qualifications?
  - Social aspects?

### ***Initial Teacher Training.***

- What has your ITT course been like so far?
  - What have you covered?
- What are its key expectations?
  - Knowledge?
  - Skills?
  - Values?
- Has your training examined gender issues in relation to education?
- Has it examined issues related to ethnic minority groups?
- What about issues related to education and social class?
- Has it looked at education and poverty?
- Was education and social exclusion covered?
- Were any of these areas approached specifically in relation to inequality?

### ***Social Class, Poverty & Social Exclusion.***

- Do you think that poverty and social exclusion are issues within schools?
  - For students?
  - Your teaching?
- What about social class, do you think that that can have an impact within schools?
  - For students?
  - Your teaching?
- Do you think schools should have a role in creating a more equal and inclusive society?
- What do you think about governments aim to tackle social exclusion through education?

### ***Institutional Aspects: Description.***

- How many placements have you been on so far?
- What kind of school was the last one?
  - State/private?
  - Academy/Faith-based/Specialist/Grammar/Leading Edge etc.
- How was it performing?
  - High/low achieving?
  - OFSTED/League Tables, etc
- How was it managed?
  - Well?
  - Efficiently?

### ***Institutional Aspects: Policy & Practice.***

- Had school League Tables had any impact on the school?
- What about parental choice?

- What about OFSTED?
- And teacher appraisal?
- Were there any specific targets the school was working towards?
- What kinds of measures were in place to improve the school?
  - Tiering?
  - D-grade boosting?
  - Partnerships with other schools?
  - Government projects or initiatives?
- What did you see as the key expectations the school had of its teachers?
  - Knowledge?
  - Skills?
  - Values?
- Do you think the way in which school operated affected pupils in any way?
  - How?
  - Were some groups of pupils affected more than others?
- How did all this correlate to your earlier expectations of teaching?

### ***Teaching Practice.***

- Which classes were you teaching?
  - Year groups?
  - Ability range?
- What was the work-load like?
- Were you able to spend as much time with pupils as you would have liked?
- Were you able to teach as you would have liked to?
- Was teaching as you thought it would be?
- Do you think it might change in any way after your training?
- What kinds of relationships were there between staff?
  - Problems/tensions?
  - Why?
- Can you identify any differences between yourself and colleagues who had been teaching for much longer?
  - What were they?

### ***Students.***

- What kind of student intake did your last school have in both social and academic terms?
  - High/low achieving?
  - Many/few FSM students?
  - What kinds of areas/neighbourhoods did they come from?
- What was it like to teach in a school with that kind of student profile?
- Were there any particular characteristics associated with high and low achievement?
- What kinds of attitudes did students have towards education?
  - Differences?
  - Why?
- Did differences in aspiration and ambition present any challenges?
- Were you able to relate to some pupils better than others?
  - Why?
- Do you think that teachers' attitudes towards students are important?

### ***Parents.***

- What kind of relationship did your last schools have with its local community?
- How did it engage parents?
- Are there different kinds of parents?
- Do you need a different approach for different parents?
- What is the value of engaging parents?
  - Can they make a difference to their children's education?
  - Why?
- Are there times when tensions can arise between teachers and parents?

- What do you think parents made of you?

***Outro/Warm-Down Questions.***

- What kind of difference do you think teachers can make to students?
  - Educationally?
  - Socially?
- Do you think that they can ever have a negative impact?
  - How?
- What about the ways schools are organised, can that make a difference?
- Do you think that raising grades is important?
  - What else is also important?
  - Why?
- What do you think the greatest challenges are in raising grades?
- What has been your best teaching experience and why?
- What has been your worst and why?
- How have your experiences so far lived up to your initial expectations of teaching?
- What makes a successful teacher?
- How do you feel that your training is preparing you for teaching?
- If you could have greater control over ITT what would you change about it?
- What would you have changed about your last school?
- Do you plan to stay in teaching?
- Do you have anything else to add, expand on, or any questions?

## **Interview Schedule: Teachers.**

### ***Personal Information.***

- Can I begin by asking how old you are?
- What did you do before deciding to become a teacher?
  - Work?
  - Study?

### ***Initial/Warm-Up Questions.***

- When did you do your training?
- What brought you to teaching?
- What kinds of expectations did you have?
  - Rewards?
  - Challenges?
- What role did you see education as playing in the lives of students?
  - Academically?
  - Socially?

### ***Initial Teacher Training.***

- What was your ITT like?
  - What did it cover?
- What were its key expectations?
  - Knowledge?
  - Skills?
  - Values?
- Can you remember if it examined gender issues in relation to education?
- What about issues related to ethnic minority groups?
- And issues related to education and social class?
- What about education and poverty?
- Did it look at education and social exclusion?
- Were any of these areas approached specifically in relation to inequality?

### ***Social Class, Poverty & Social Exclusion.***

- Do you think that poverty and social exclusion are issues within schools?
  - For students?
  - Your teaching?
- What about social class, do you think that that can have an impact within schools?
  - For students?
  - Your teaching?
- Do you think schools should have a role in creating a more equal and inclusive society?
- What do you think about governments aim to tackle social exclusion through education?

### ***Institutional Aspects: Description.***

- What kind of school are you presently teaching in?
  - State/private?
  - Academy/Faith-based/Specialist/Grammar/Leading Edge etc?
- How is it performing?
  - High/low achieving?
  - OFSTED/League Tables, etc
- How is it managed?
  - Well?
  - Efficiently?

### ***Institutional Aspects: Policy & Practice.***

- Have school League Tables had any impact on the school?
- What about parental choice?
- What kind of impact have OFSTED had?

- And teacher appraisal?
- Rebuilding?
- Are there any specific targets the school is working towards?
- What kinds of measures are in place to improve the school?
  - Tiering?
  - D-grade boosting?
  - Partnerships with other schools?
  - Government projects or initiatives?
- What do you see as the key expectations schools have of their teachers?
  - Knowledge?
  - Skills?
  - Values?
- Do you think the way in which these schools operated affected pupils in any way?
  - How?
  - Were some groups of pupils affected more than others?
- How has all this correlated to your earlier expectations of teaching?

### ***Teaching Practice.***

- Which classes do you usually teach?
  - Year groups?
  - Ability range?
- What is your work-load like?
- Have you been able to spend as much time with pupils as you would like?
- Have you been able to teach as you would like to?
- Is teaching as you thought it would be?
- What kinds of relationships are there between staff?
  - Problems/tensions?
  - Why?
- Can you identify any differences between yourself and colleagues who had been teaching for much longer?
  - What were they?
  - And what about trainees?

### ***Students.***

- What kind of student intake do you have in both social and academic terms?
  - High/low achieving?
  - Many/few FSM students?
  - What kinds of areas/neighbourhoods did they come from?
- What is it like teaching in a school with such a student profile?
- Are there any particular characteristics associated with high and low achievement?
- What kinds of attitudes do students have towards education?
  - Differences?
  - Why?
- Did differences in aspiration and ambition present any challenges?
- Are you able to relate to some pupils better than others?
  - Why?
- Do you think that teachers' attitudes towards such students are important?

### ***Parents.***

- What kind of relationship does the school have with its local community?
- How have they engaged parents?
- Are there different kinds of parents?
- Do you need a different approach for different parents?
- What is the value of engaging parents?
  - Can they make a difference to their children's education?
  - Why?
- Are there times when tensions can arise between teachers and parents?

- Why?
- What do you think parents made of you?

***Outro/Warm-Down Questions.***

- What kind of difference do you think teachers can make to students
  - Educationally?
  - In terms of their wider lives?
- Do you think that they can ever have a negative impact?
  - How?
- What about the ways schools are organised, can that make a difference?
- Do you think that raising grades is important?
  - What else is also important?
  - Why?
- What do you think the greatest challenges are in raising grades?
- What has been your best teaching experience and why?
- What has been your worst and why?
- How have your experiences so far lived up to your initial expectations of teaching?
- What makes a successful teacher?
- How do you feel that your training prepared you for teaching?
- If you could have greater control over ITT what would you change about it?
- What would you change in your own school?
- What would you change if you had greater influence on the government?
- Are you planning to stay in teaching?
- Do you have anything else to add, expand on, or any questions?



## **Interview Schedule: Young People.**

### ***Personal Information.***

- Can I begin by asking how old you are?
- And your gender? You're obviously a.....!
- Do you have any brothers or sisters?
  - Older/younger?
  - Were they in school with you?

### ***Initial Warm-up Questions.***

- So how long is it since you finished school then?
- And can we just do a quick time-line of what schools you were at and when?
- Ok, and so what have you been up to since you finished?

### ***Early Years.***

- So did you grow up around here then?
- Who looked after you when you were young?  
(If parent(s))
  - What did she/he/they do then?
  - Did they go to any of your schools?
- And do you know if you went to nursery or playschool or anything?
  - Do you remember anything about it?
  - Did you like it?
  - Why/why not?
- Can you remember what you wanted to be when you were a kid?

### ***Primary Years.***

- So what was your time at your primary school/s like then?
- Can you remember your first day/week/year?
- Did you already know anybody?
  - How did it go friends wise?
- Can you remember how you felt about going to school?
  - Did you like it/was it fun?
- What was the work like?
  - Easy/hard, interesting/boring?
- What did you like best/least about school?
  - Why?
- What were your teachers like?
  - Best/worst, favourite(s)?
  - Why?
  - Did you like them?
  - Do you think that they liked you?
- What was it like doing your SAT's and other tests at primary school?
  - Did you think they were important?
  - Did teachers think they were important?
  - How would you normally do in them?
  - How did you feel about your marks?
- Did you ever have any homework?
  - Easy/hard, interesting/boring?
  - Would anyone ever help you out with school work?
- Did you have parent's evenings?
- What kinds of reports would you get?
- What did your parents/carers think about your marks and reports?
- Did you have any idea of what you wanted to do or be when you were older?

### ***Transition to Secondary School.***

- How did you feel about leaving primary school and going to secondary school then?
  - Excited/scarred?
- Which secondary school did you go to?
- Can you remember how you decided to go there?
  - Brothers/sisters, friends, parents, location, reputation?
- What did you know about the school beforehand?
- What kind of reputation did other secondary schools have?
- So what was your time at your secondary school/s like then?
- And so what were your first days and weeks like then?

***Structures, Processes & Relations.***

- So did you have any favourite subjects at school?
- And were you in sets for subjects?
- What did it mean to be in each set?
  - Top/middle/bottom?
  - Which kids would you get in each set?
- And what was it like in the sets then?
  
- What did you think of your teachers at school then?
  - What do you think they thought of you guys?
  - Did you have a least/favourite teacher(s)?
  - Why?
  - Do you think they liked you?
  - How important was it to teachers that you did well?
  - Why
  - Do you think they were under any kind of pressure?
  - Why?
  - Were marks and results important to them?
  - Did you ever have any trainees come in?
  - What were they like?
  - Did you ever hear anything about OFSTED?
  - What about school league tables?
- What were the head-teacher and other senior staff like?
  
- So what was the work like at school then?
  - Easy/hard, interesting/boring?
  - Would anyone (i.e. friends/parents) ever help you out with school work?
  
- And so what was behaviour like in school then?
- Were you ever in trouble?
  - How?
  - Why?
- Did you ever truant?
  - How come?
- Were you ever suspended or excluded?
  - What for?
  
- Did your parent(s)/carer(s) have any contact with the school?
  - What was it like?
  - Did they come along to parents evening?
  - What were your reports like?
  
- Did you do SAT's at secondary school?
  - Was there pressure to do well?
  - Did you feel under pressure personally?
  - Why? From where? From who?
  - What it mean to do well or not so well?

- How did you feel about your mark at the end of it?
- So how did you choose your options then?
  - Brothers/sisters, friends, teachers, parents?
  - Did you have any idea of what you wanted to do?
- What was it like doing your final exams at secondary school?
- What kind of grades had you been predicted?
  - What did you think about them?
- Was there pressure to do well?
  - Did you feel it?
- Were there any extra classes for you to help you raise your marks?
- What did it mean to do well or not so well in the exams?
- How did you get on?
- How did you feel about your marks?

***Outro/Warm-down Questions.***

- So what was it like to finish school then?
- Did you know what you wanted to do?
  - (If so)
  - How did you decide?
- What do you think the best and worst things were about secondary school?
- Do you think it was valuable for you?
- When was your happiest period at school and why?
- If you could have changed things about secondary school what would you have done?
- What do you think you got out of school?
- What are your plans for the future then?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

**Research Participant Consent Form.**

**Name:.....**

**I have agreed to participate in the research project being conducted by Will Roberts. I have been briefed on what taking part in the research involves, how my identity and information will be treated, and I am happy for the information I give to be used in the project.**

**Signature:..... Date:.....**

**Receipt of Payment Form.**

**Name:.....**

**I have received a £15 voucher in payment for contributing to a study being conducted by Will Roberts.**

**Signed:..... Date:.....**

**Researchers Signature:..... Date:.....**